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The kingdom of our Lord  
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Miss C Fuller

with the affectionate regards  
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THE  
KINGDOM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST:

A  
PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF

MATT. XVI. 13—28, XVII., XVIII.; MARK VIII. 27—38, IX.; LUKE IX. 18—50.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM WILSON,

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE following work is not in the ordinary sense exegetical. It does not deal in a minute analysis of words and their uses. The author, however, has uniformly aimed at ascertaining the exact meaning of the text, and the connection and bearing of the statements it contains. But his chief object has been practical, rather than critical. In carrying out his design, he has not hesitated to avail himself of such helps as were within his reach, in the shape of Commentaries and Expositions, both ancient and modern. The learned reader will perceive that he has been chiefly indebted to the two treatises of *R. C. Trench*, the one on the Parables, and the other on the Miracles of our Lord, and to the work of *R. Stier*, on the Words of the Lord Jesus.

The passage in the Gospels which he has selected for his exposition seemed to stand sufficiently distinct from the context to admit of separate treatment, without, at the same time, being merely fragmentary. The topics which he has attempted to discuss are at once important in themselves, and have not been hackneyed by a too voluminous authorship; and, while conscious of its many imperfections,



he commends this, his first essay in this field of literary labour, to the indulgent consideration of his Christian readers, in the hope that, by the blessing of God, it may not be altogether fruitless.

DUNDEE, *15th February 1859.*

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THE  
KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

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CHAPTER I.

THE KINGDOM FOUNDED.

Matt. xvi. 13—19. Mark viii. 27—29. Luke ix. 18—20.

THE scene of the pregnant conversation recorded in the text lies beyond the waters of Merom, and near the sources of the Jordan. It is within sight of the snow-capped mountains of Hermon and Anti-Libanus, and in the angle formed by their divergence. There, amid the magnificence of the mountain-land, Jesus unfolds to his grieved and disappointed disciples the nature of the work which he had come into the world to do. It was a scene amid which the lessons he now teaches might be most fitly learned. From these snow-clad mountains, the abode of perennial barrenness, descended the refreshing, inexhaustible streams which fertilised the land, and that Jordan which was a beauty and glory to it. So He, the despised and rejected One, springing like a root out of a dry ground, and having no form nor comeliness that men should desire Him, was yet the source of all fruitfulness and vitality in the earth, a spring of living water which was destined to spread itself



over the moral waste, and to make glad the wilderness and solitary place, and to cause the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Before them, and on either hand, as they journeyed northward to Cesarea Philippi, were the lofty everlasting hills, which shadowed forth, in significant emblem, the power and stability of that kingdom against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

Doubtless Jesus has led his disciples thither in deep sorrow of heart. Woe has been accumulating upon his head from day to day. Encountering everywhere a hardened, impenetrable unbelief, which was only quickened by his discourses and miracles into stupid wonder, he has provoked that malignity which nothing will satisfy but his crucifixion. Yet his is far from being the woe of despair. When the cross is in view, the joy also is set before him. He takes these disciples into the region of Cesarea that they might realize them both,—to lay the foundation of his imperishable kingdom, and to prepare them for the dark future which was awaiting them.

It is an eventful period in the gospel history—signalised then by peculiar indications of its importance—and in the future history of the Church, by the vital controversies which have gathered round it. The text has formed the battle-ground of Protestantism and Popery. It is here that the Papists have sought to lay the foundations of their system, and, from the vantage ground they think it affords, to make conquest of the world. It is a text, therefore, which demands a full and attentive consideration. It is our purpose to make the examination of it as little controversial as possible,—to content ourselves rather with a thorough exposition of the Lord's meaning in it, and that in its bearing, not so much on the delusions and assumptions of Popery, as on matters more personal to ourselves.

## § I. THE PREPARATION.

Observe how Jesus was employed immediately before this conversation with his disciples. The Evangelist Luke says, he was alone praying. Taking our information from the three evangelists, who with greater or less fulness, record the conversation, we gather that Jesus, who, in the fulfilment of his mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and of the word of prophecy concerning him, had set himself to go over all the land of Israel,—purposed visiting the towns of Cesarea Philippi. On his journey northward, and when he had reached the border of that region, having come into its coasts, he seeks a resting place for himself and his wearied followers, before again visiting the haunts of men. As formerly, on his way through Samaria, he had sat down at Jacob's well to rest his wearied limbs and seek the refreshment of its waters, and there had sought and found occasion for revealing the doctrine regarding himself with such power and success as was rarely witnessed ; so now again, while on the way, he uses the time of rest for the high and beneficent purposes of his mission. He finds rest, in fact, not in absolute repose, but in changing the character of his labour—he refreshes himself in the doing of his Father's work.

And, first of all, he seeks it in holy converse with the Father himself. He is alone praying. How often we read of him seeking this kind of refreshment! He feeds and strengthens his soul by prayer. Especially at every remarkable epoch of his ministry we find him alone praying. Doubtless it was often so with him in cases in which the fact is not recorded. But when it is recorded, we shall find it always marking some peculiarly important event or work

At his baptism he prayed and received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Before choosing his disciples, and giving them his first solemn charge ; when he began to unfold his kingly office ; now on the borders of Cesarea Philippi ; and again at his transfiguration on the Mount, and last of all in the Garden of Gethsemane, we find him alone praying. In the present instance he was not in the strictest sense alone, for we are told that the disciples were with him. The narrative indeed makes it evident enough that he was praying both with and for them. He was about to propose to them a very solemn and decisive question, on their answer to which depended their future character and history, and he does not do this without prayer. It was a question which demanded the honest answer of the heart, and which could only receive a right answer as the result of divine teaching and illumination. Doubtless, then, it is for such light that Jesus prays, and in answer to his prayer the light shines into the darkness. It is prayer always that brings light to the soul, and it is the chief instrument for diffusing it over the earth. Jesus had now been long with these men—living in their presence and society for successive months and years—he had been teaching them with a diligence, simplicity, and power unexampled—he had unfolded before them the treasures of his grace, and love, and strength, and as yet they had given no very decisive evidence that they truly knew him, and the nature of his work, and their own great need of understanding both. In these circumstances he prays.

It is an example to all time. We, too, have had a ministry of external appliances, more abundant and longer sustained than they enjoyed—a more full and distinct revelation of the character and person and work of Christ, than had been yet vouchsafed to them—a completed revelation—

a gospel ministry—our Sabbath rest and its manifold golden opportunities. Are we sure that our minds have been enlightened, or are we still sitting in the region of the shadow of death? Alas! of how many is this evidently true, that, while they are enjoying all the means of grace, they have not become gracious—that, while so often hearing of the Saviour, they have not yet truly apprehended him, and do not know the Christ the Son of the living God, nor have truly confessed his name. Pray—cry to God out of the depths. God's order is, first, prayer, and then more abundant grace—light—the knowledge of the truth, and then peace and gladness. There is darkness till God thus visit the soul. But, in answer to earnest prayer, He, who of old did cause the light to shine out of darkness will shine in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

These disciples of Jesus have now reached an important epoch in their history. The scene in which they are at present acting a part effects a great change both in their relation to Jesus and to the world. Hitherto they have been merely disciples, at the feet of Jesus, receiving instruction in the things pertaining to the Kingdom,—never, indeed, altogether to lose that character, and abandon that attitude; but now they are to enter upon a new function. Jesus is preparing them for becoming witness-bearers. The whole import of the conversation which here took place between them has reference to this transition. In time past, indeed, they had been peculiarly privileged, and had been learning much regarding the character and work of their heavenly master. In this very interview they are learning still more. Their past intercourse was the discipline and education by which they were becoming fitted to confess Christ before men. Jesus had, indeed, already sent



them on a brief mission—but it was a preparatory one merely—not essentially different from that of John the Baptist—to announce the near advent of the Kingdom—not that Christ had already come, but that he was near. Hitherto they had not been called on to say any thing of Christ ; but he now draws out from them a confession of his character and dignity. In doing so he warns them, indeed, that their function as his witnesses was not immediately to be exercised. “Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.” The time had not come yet for commencing their work as witnesses. His work was not yet finished on earth, nor his victory over death accomplished.

Notwithstanding, this was to them a new era. Their subsequent intercourse with Jesus, and his teaching had henceforth to them a new significance and purpose. It now appears to them that they had been admitted to all this friendly intercourse, and were even now receiving such divine light—not for their own gratification and advancement merely, but that they might be able to testify of the grace of God. What they knew and believed, the time would soon come for them to declare and witness. Entering into the life of Christ, into the real apprehension and knowledge of his person and work—they were destined to be like him. As He was in the world, so were they to be—givers as well as receivers—receivers in order that they might be able to give. Theirs, hereafter, was not to be a discipleship merely, but an apostleship also. What they had seen and heard they would be bound to declare. And in their after history they fully realised this obligation, and faithfully discharged it. They could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard. Appropriating Christ by faith, they necessarily entered upon the doing of Christ's

work. This was the essential condition and law of that light which had entered into their minds. It was a light to be reflected, not absorbed. As it shined into their hearts it diffused its radiance from that centre. This was the very element and spring of their spiritual existence.

To them this was quite a new phase of character. It was new in the history of the world. There was nothing like it in heathenism. It was very partially manifested in Judaism, and not at all when that religion became corrupted. It is true indeed that teaching was not a thing unknown. Both the Pharisees and the heathen cherished and manifested the ambition of making proselytes. The former were peculiarly zealous in this kind of work, as all truly earnest formalists or ritualists have ever been. But the object of their zeal was to strengthen a sect or party—to add adherents to a Church—to bring men within the round of certain forms—to gratify a worldly ambition. The function of the Apostles was to be essentially different. Theirs was to be a self-sacrifice, and not a self-exaltation. They were to confess and declare what they had seen and heard and felt. They were not inventors, but witnesses—reflectors of that heavenly light which shined in their hearts. It was their aim not to gain disciples to a school, but to re-unite men in faith and love unto God.

Nor was this function peculiar to the Apostles, or to those who are specifically set apart to preach the gospel. It is essentially the function of every true Christian. He who has been divinely taught must needs become a teacher—he who knows is constituted a witness—the recipient of grace a dispenser of it. He in whom Christ dwells is a Christian, and a Christian is one who acts the part of Christ in seeking and saving souls. It behoves us to ask in what respect and to what extent we are discharging this function—both

as a Church, and as individual members of it? How greatly the Church has sinned in this respect, and consequently how little divine life and energy it possesses! How little witness-bearing, and consequently how little to testify of the grace of God! For this is the universal law of the administration of grace, that if we will not communicate we shall not receive. The manna which now descends from heaven is not designed to be stored up, any more than that which fell in the wilderness of old. It is given for use, and therefore must be put to use. The talent which has been bestowed is not to be buried, but to be put out to usury.

#### § II.—THE PRELIMINARY QUESTION AND ANSWER.

The disciples, as we have seen, were now to become confessors of Christ's name, his witnesses among men, to be not merely disciples but apostles also. To prepare for their more thorough apprehension of this grand truth, Jesus proposes to them a preliminary question. As their function was to be that of confessors and witnesses, it was important to have present to their minds a sense of the need man had of the testimony they were to bear. Therefore this question is put, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Let us attend, then, to the import and bearing of this preliminary question. It is obviously designed to prepare, open up, and ripen their minds for the more decisive question which was to follow, as well as for the great and honourable work to which they were to be called. Whom do *men* say that I am? What knowledge have they of me? What conception of the nature of my person, and offices, of my special errand to this world, and my work in it? What is the state of their information and beliefs?

Do they know, whence I come, who I am, and what I am to accomplish? It is a question which obviously has a most important bearing on what is to follow, and especially on the duty of confession and witness-bearing. It is an invitation to them to survey the condition in which men were living and dying. If the knowledge and belief which themselves had attained, were not an utter delusion, it was obviously the most vital and influential of all knowledge, with which it is the highest concern of men to become acquainted, and hence, if they are not utterly callous to all human interests, it must become their chief duty to proclaim it.

The particular form of the question, moreover, is especially worthy of notice. In it, Jesus designates himself as the Son of Man. He here proclaims again what he is, in the same terms, indeed, as he had frequently done before; but now, in peculiar circumstances, and with a most pregnant meaning. They, by divine teaching, as immediately appears, had apprehended him as the Christ, the Son of God—he asserts for himself another and humbler title, that of the Son of Man. He presents to them the human aspect of his character—they look at the divine. They confess his Godhead—he, his manhood. They worship him in the light of that new glory which radiated into their souls, he still proclaims his brotherhood with them. They recognise in him the fountain of life—he asserts his will and desire to bestow that life. They feed and sustain their own souls by contemplating the Christ—he proclaims his relationship to them as men. There is the most perfect harmony in this intelligent and holy converse. They behold the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—he will have them look forth from this altitude upon the state of their brother men. Having confessed to him they must



bear witness to men. He is the Son of Man—not the Son of David only—not in an exclusive and sectarian sense a Jew, but the Son of Man, claiming an affinity with all tribes and kindreds of the earth, a light to lighten the Gentiles as well as the glory of his people Israel.

The locality as well as the words gave point and significance to his gracious purpose. He had led them to the remotest confines of Palestine, and in the northern extremity of Galilee of the Gentiles proclaims himself again the Son of Man. Now, indeed, as once before, seeking as it were to overleap the barriers within which his ministry was limited, and panting for the glorious expansion which his completed work, after the resurrection, was to secure, but specially now also inviting these disciples to take a survey of the field which it would be theirs to cultivate, and from which they were to reap an abundant harvest. Whom do men—not the Jews merely—say that I, the Son of Man, am? What do they say of me, what do they know and believe? Look at the darkness which covers the earth, and the gross darkness which envelopes the people.

Out of the answer to this question, in short, springs the pressing and paramount duty of witness-bearing. I am the Son of man—not your brother merely—not exclusively of the kindred of the Jews—but the elder brother of a countless family, whose highest interest it is to know me, to know me thoroughly and truly as you are learning to do, and who, through your confession of me, must attain that knowledge, but who as yet, alas, are in bondage and darkness, and lying under the sentence of eternal death, from which nothing can free them till this knowledge of me is imparted to their souls. Thus in the very moment when these men assert their Christianity, they are bound over to be missionaries. Their confession was not to be a matter between Christ and

themselves, but to become the common property of men. To the false conceptions and beliefs of men, they were to oppose the true testimony which God had taught them.

These are always the essential conditions and qualifications of a true Church—1st, A personal knowledge of and belief in Christ ; 2nd, The propagation of that belief. Even in this remote age of the world's history, Jesus through this word is still repeating to all his disciples the question, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am ? While they rejoicingly and gratefully contemplate and own him as the Christ, he still presents the human aspect of his character, in its broad universal relationships, thereby revealing the object of his mission as co-extensive with the human family ; and in his loving regard and compassion for their ignorance, he puts the solemn question, Whom do these say that I am ?

What answer shall be given to the Christ, the Son of the living God ? Shall it be more satisfactory than the response this question at first received ? To what extent, in what true vital divine sense, is Jesus yet known among men ? In the Church and in the world is it not true now as then, that while the falsest conceptions of him prevail in the Church, there is an utter and deadly ignorance of him over the greater part of the world ? Why is it so ? Is not Jesus the Son of Man ? Is not the world the field which he has given the Church to cultivate ? Has she even attempted, since the Apostles' days, in any way commensurate with her duty and responsibility, to do this work, which, after all, is the primary and essential work of a Church ? Have we personally been praying and labouring for a different result ? Do we care for the countless multitudes of the ignorant and perishing—do we pray for the promised effusion of the divine Spirit—for the salvation of souls ? Have we in us the Spirit of Christ—the mind of him, who in the

fulness of his grace, though he was rich yet became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich ?

Consider now the answer which the disciples actually made to this question. "Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Alas for the Church then on earth ! The builders reject the headstone of the corner, and consequently are building a house which will overwhelm them in its ruins—not a true temple of the living God, but a tower of Babel, which is destined to become a desolation. Truly Jesus had come to his own, and his own received him not. These disciples have given, doubtless, a true report. They say nothing of men at large. The question of Jesus has a far wider scope than their answer. Their minds seemed as yet unable to embrace the thought, that the great world of outlying heathenism would have any vital interest in Christ. But they speak of the Jews, of the visible Church then existing on earth. What had it become ? Was it not nigh unto cursing ? How could it be a Church and yet reject Christ ? Had it not already become a synagogue of Satan ? In despising and crucifying him, did it not proclaim itself to be beyond the pale of Christianity, and no longer a Church of God ? The event proved it. Yea, silently, in that remote mountain region, under the shadow of Hermon and Lebanon, Jesus even now is formally setting it aside, and virtually pronouncing its doom. He is setting up a Church outside of it, to testify against it—building an ark for the safety of his people, when the billows of divine indignation should sweep away those who were saying peace and safety—who, under the power of a desolating formalism, counted the Saviour for an enemy, and rested their hope on the destroyer.

Yet, as always happens in such circumstances, the case did not appear so bad as it really was. That wicked

and apostate Church, which was so blinded and perverted, had not ceased to expect the Messiah. Nay, it is evident that they thought his advent and their deliverance very near. They had a faith, not that, indeed, which rests on the sure warrant of God's word—but a faith which had accommodated itself to their carnal and ambitious views. They could not fail to see that some remarkable visitor had come among them. By his preaching and miracles Jesus had produced a general impression on the public mind. His work filled them with many speculations. They never dreamed indeed that he was the Christ—but might he not be some herald to announce his coming! They knew the prediction that before the Lord should come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant, Elias, was first to come. He was not to appear without warning. They had, therefore, this foundation for their faith in the appearance of Elias. But if this were Elias, then Jesus must be very near, and it was time for them to be setting their house in order. They had no Bible reason indeed to expect any other herald of Jesus than Elias, but in entire conformity with the pharisaic practice they had clustered round this scriptural intimation a variety of traditions and conjectures. If Elias was to come, why not Jeremiah also, why not others of the prophets? Nay, to greet the advent of the promised Messiah, and to grace his glorious reign on earth, might there not be a resurrection of many prophets and righteous men, who might not only prepare the people for his coming, but become the princes and satraps in his universal kingdom? In Galilee the guilt of Herod had originated another belief, which it appears his political adherents continued to cherish—namely, that Jesus was John the Baptist, who had risen again. With them such beliefs were widely different from the common oriental doctrine of the transmigration of souls.

Theirs was a truer faith, and one having a more solid foundation in reality. They believed in the immortality and resurrection of the body. They believed in the actual re-appearance of these prophets—the reanimation of their dust, and the resumption, by the very men who had once lived, of those functions which of old they had discharged.

But the answer of the disciples makes it evident that all was vagueness and uncertainty to them. They could not fasten their minds on one consistent belief. Their traditions had deprived them of this capacity. Apart from these, and on the assumption on which they proceeded, this could be none other than Elias. But, confused by their traditions, they did not know what to think. Of this at least they were sure, that this could not be the Messiah. He was to be of the royal lineage of David—this man was a Nazarene. He was to be a king and conqueror—this man was a companion of fishermen, who received sinners and ate with them. There was for him a kind of popular respect as a prophet, but no apprehension of him as the Messiah.

Such was the sad condition of the Church then. As for the world without it, they had no knowledge of him at all. True faith at that moment was as nearly extinct on earth as it had ever been. As it was in the days of Noah, so was it when the Son of Man came.

Have we much reason to congratulate ourselves that our lot has fallen on happier times? Within the wide spread domain of Christendom, what true single-hearted faith is there in Christ the Son of the living God? What a variety of speculations, traditions, and conjectures regarding him! What fatal errors respecting his person and work are prevailing as the avowed creed of many so-called churches! And within the pale of those churches which have a sounder confession, to how few has the arm of the Lord been really



revealed ! To a vast multitude he is merely the son of Mary, and an object of dread rather than of love and worship, while the mother is the mediator who is trusted and adored. To how many is he nothing more than the model representative man—not the Lord from heaven, but the bringer in of a new and purer earthly philosophy ! How few really know and confess him,—are able by the Holy Ghost to call him Lord ! How great a number are there who have indeed a form of sound words, but who have never attempted to penetrate their meaning—who, as of themselves, can make no true confession of the Christ in his person and offices—who have not laid hold on him as the hope, and refuge, and anchor of their souls ! What of ourselves ? In the face of this questioning, where do we stand ? What think ye of Christ ? What is he to you, not in word only, but in power and in reality ?

### § III.—THE MAIN QUESTION.

It is to this practical, personal question, to which Jesus now directs the attention of his disciples. “ Whom say ye that I am ? ” Amid these conflicting views and sentiments, and floating speculations, which lead to no certain issue, what is your testimony ? What light has entered into your minds ? It is now time to understand what is your relation to me. What have you to say of me ? It was not good that their minds should dwell upon the condition of others—he brings them therefore nearer home. It was necessary, with a view to their work and mission, that they should take a survey of the world’s ignorance and misconceptions, that the sentiment of divine compassion and pity should be awakened within

them. But from this survey they are instantly recalled to the personal question.

In such a process there is the most profound wisdom. It is the mode in which Jesus always deals with the true Church, with his believing people. This is the current of their healthful meditations. It is thus that the Church is strengthened for her work, and stimulated to undertake it ; it furnishes a beautiful contrast to the pharisaic meditations. They also, for Satan ever strives to imitate the divine, surveyed the errors and delusions of men. This was the staple of their thoughts and conversation. It was a study which nourished their spiritual pride and self righteousness. They looked at the surrounding darkness, till they imagined that the sparks of their own kindling were a light from heaven, and boldly thanked God that they were not as other men. It is far otherwise in this questioning of Jesus. If, for a moment, he turns the eye of his disciples to the errors and delusions of other men, it was to awaken them to a holy jealousy over themselves. These men think and say such false things of me, what are your thoughts and beliefs ? The errors that prevail manifest your own liability to fall into them. Take heed to yourselves. Are your own hearts right with God ? It was a double blessing which he was thus bestowing on them. His questioning at once manifested the relation in which they stood to the surrounding world, and the way in which they were to be able to discharge the debt they owed it. There was a reflex power in such questioning. What is the religious condition of men,—what is your own ? Their first glance is at unbelievers, their second into themselves, and then from themselves back again to the world, and to their struggles against its ignorance and corruptions, and the final victory over it.

So it is always. If I wish you to enter on a church's grand, true work, to vindicate your professed character as Christians, and to advance Christ's kingdom on earth, I must first ask you to look to the state in which the world is. Whom do men say that Jesus is? Consider how, because there is no vision the people perish. They do not know Christ, and die in their sins. At home, and over the earth, what darkness there is!—what wretchedness, what vain and cruel superstition! Have pity on them, even that pity which dwelt in the bosom of Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost. But if such divine pity is to reign in your hearts, if it is to become operative, not to exist as a sentiment merely, but to develop itself in action, you must look elsewhere. What say ye of him? Your eye must not be on the world merely, but it must revert to Christ. It is in your own apprehension of him that your spirit will grow into the energy and depth of his love. It is in the light of his glory that your heart grows into the likeness of his compassion. We there best apprehend the world's hopeless blindness and enmity, there we gather the purpose and the courage to wrestle against and overcome it. Here lies the secret at once of our weakness and strength. The secret of our weakness in that we have not lived near enough Christ, have not apprehended him as we ought, have scarcely even asked what testimony our hearts are ready to bear concerning him. Our faith has been rather in the form of sound words than in the loving reception of a present Saviour, the Son of the living God. Hence the coldness and feebleness of our activity in his cause. It was not so with these apostolic men; they saw Christ and lived with and upon him, and entered into his life, and so had constancy and courage to undertake and to do his work. This is the very transformation and revival which we need, namely, to realize a present

living Saviour, to find a heart-answer to the question, whom say ye that I am. It is a question we must answer to Jesus himself, who knows what is in us, and what we really believe and think.

#### § IV.—THE CONFESSION.

In the exposition of this remarkable and pregnant passage of Scripture, we have now come to consider the Confession of Faith made by Peter, in his own name and in that of the other disciples. It is of importance, in examining this confession, that we should consider not only its real meaning and import, but also its bearing on the actual position and future history of the apostles. The latter of these two points it will be of advantage to examine first, not only because this will help to clear the way for our examination of the confession itself, but aid us in determining its true place in the narrative, and its bearing on the whole argument.

In the first place, then, the connection of the passage renders it obvious that this confession opened the way for the organization of the disciples into a Church, having a recognized constitution and functions. It placed them on an altogether new footing, and involved a great revolution in their spiritual standing and history. By it they stepped at once out of the bondage of Jewish traditions into the light and liberty of the gospel. It set them apart from all other men, and was the occasion and cause of their organization into a new society. It forms the basis of the constitution of the Christian, as distinguished from the Jewish Church. In one respect indeed, and that the most important of all, the Jewish and Christian Church were one,—that is to say, the true Christian and the true Jewish Church, the Church

invisible of both communities, consisting not of the visible society organized under the name of a Church, but of those individuals who really held and acted out the faith of Abraham, whom God's Spirit had instructed and renewed, and unto whom was imputed the righteousness of the Redeemer. But, as a visible society the two churches were not only not identical, but came into immediate and violent collision. The Jewish Church persecuted the Christian; having lost the faith of Abraham, it had not only become a carnal society, but the most intensely carnal of all societies, as was manifest in its earliest and most bitter hatred of the disciples of Jesus as well as of Jesus himself. This, indeed, is always the result when a church becomes corrupt, and merely formalistic, as has been manifested abundantly from the beginning, in the history of the mutual relations between the Church and the world. Persecution is the very element and life of a formalism which is really earnest and has become something more than a decent cover for irreligion. Thus it has happened that the true Church has been hated and afflicted not so much by the world as such, but under the name and guise of that very religion which she not only professes, but really holds.

It is of this visible society that Jesus here and throughout this passage speaks, as appears—(1.) From the fact that this is the usual acceptation of the term Church, or kingdom of heaven, when Jesus speaks of it generally and without any note of limitation as in Matt. xiii. 24–47, where under various figures he sets forth the constitution and condition of the kingdom of heaven. (2.) He here speaks expressly of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and as consisting of pure and impure elements, ver. 19. And (3.) He announces his purpose in ver. 18, to build the Church: "I will build." It is a thing to be done in the future. But the Church



invisible had been in course of building from the time of Abel.

Assuming this then, that the question here is one regarding the visible church, or society organised under a common profession and laws of administration and discipline, it is evidently not possible to ascertain the actual faith of its members. The church must, therefore, have a confession. The church invisible needs no confession—and has in point of fact none. Of this church Peter was as truly a member before he had uttered his confession as after he had done it. He was a member of it so soon as by the teaching of the Holy Spirit he knew the truth and had received it into his heart. But confession with the mouth is what constitutes a church state. This is the element of an external organization, and is essential to the visibility of a church. This was the formative principle at first, and it is so still.

Confession is necessary to individual membership. In substance the church must always seek an answer to this question, Whom do ye say that Christ is? It is the confession which this question elicits that determines the matter of church membership. Obviously it is always possible that the answer, though true in words, may be false in fact—that the confession may be of the lips only, and not of the heart. But the question in one form or other must be put and answered in order to church membership. Without it there can be no access to a rightly constituted church. For if, without confession, membership were possible, the separate identity and peculiar organization of a church would be at an end. There might, indeed, be Christians in the world, composing a church invisible, but there could be no church in the ordinary sense of the term. Its whole structure is based on confession.

A church which desires its fellowship to be pure will

also take pains to ascertain the credibility of the confession which is made. There are certain marks by which a confession of faith is rendered utterly incredible. The apprehension and reception of the Christ the Son of the living God, implies a change of character as well as of position. If I am a believer I am renewed, and walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. Such tests are insufficient indeed to ascertain the reality—the actual truth—of the confession. They are negative rather than positive, and determine rather what is not than what is. The nature of my conduct may be such as to determine with absolute certainty that I am not a believer—it cannot determine with such certainty that I am. And so the church, even when its discipline has been most faithful and perfect, has always contained within its pale, the false as well as the true, the unregenerate as well as the regenerate, the tares growing beside the wheat. But to all its members the testing question has been put, and all of them have given to it substantially Peter's answer. This, and nothing else, has made us a visible church, an organized society. This common confession binds us together, and forms the basis of our whole church order and administration.

Yet let us never regard it as a question conclusively settled by our first answer. Let us ever revert to it anew, and all the more because we have already on a previous occasion answered it. Let us seek to ascertain what proof we have that the answer we once gave was a genuine one. Jesus is ever putting this question to us in his Word, is repeating it again to us now. What must be our honest answer to it at this present time? In what way and to what extent are we manifesting the truthfulness of the confession we have made? Because we entered the church by confession, and because it is confession which constitutes a church, it behoves us to enquire how we have maintained and acted out our testimony.

Are we confessing Christ before men, and in our place and sphere fulfilling the end of a church?

It is presupposed and implied in the fact that confession is necessary to individual membership, that every church has a public confession. Written or unwritten, formally or really, all churches have it, and must have it in order to their existence and organization. It is impossible otherwise to put this fundamental question, or to form an intelligent and just judgment of the answer to it, or, in other words, to determine upon the admission or exclusion of members. There are churches, indeed, which glory in the fact of their having no confession of faith—that is to say, no formal or written creed apart from the Holy Scriptures. But these churches find that at least they cannot dispense with the substance and reality of a confession, when they lay aside the form. Their members cannot cohere as a church without a mutual understanding of the meaning they attach to fundamental Bible truths. And such churches do in point of fact, because they cannot possibly avoid it, receive members on a confession more or less minute of their having the same faith with the church which admits them into her fellowship, or they exclude them from such fellowship on the knowledge that they are destitute of the faith which the church holds.

Churches which have a formal written confession of faith, have been accused, indeed, of substituting the human for the Divine—of putting in the place of the Bible man's exposition of the truth which it contains. Such an accusation as this is either true or false, according to the sense which the charge may be made to bear. It is false, if it is alleged that a public confession necessarily takes the place of the Bible, and assumes an authority independent of its declarations. It is true, if the meaning be that a confession of

faith is a human statement of what the church believes to be in the Bible, and consequently resting on the Bible as the only authority for the doctrines it contains, as well as for the belief which it imposes. This indeed, is the only proper place and function of a confession of faith.

In the first place, it is a public declaration of the understanding which the church has of the truth which God has revealed in his word.

Secondly, as resulting from this, it is a common bond of union among the members of the church.

Thirdly, it is a conjoint testimony to those beyond the pale of the church, regarding what she holds and teaches.

Fourthly, it is a very important instrument for the conservation of that truth to which the church has once attained.

The greater number of churches in all ages, have, accordingly, recognized the necessity of a public written confession of faith, and have issued such a document. It will, of course, very much depend on the external relations which a church in any particular age or country may occupy, what articles her creed may embrace—on the conflicts in which she may be engaged against prevalent errors and heresies. The first confession of the Christian church, that, namely, which we have recorded in the text, is a singularly brief one, though it contains the substance of many larger and more copious documents. It is here that we have the genuine Apostles' creed. In the future history of the church confessions were necessarily enlarged, and made to embrace a greater variety of articles, according to the internal divisions which arose among her members, or the assaults to which she was exposed from without.

It has been alleged that a confession of faith keeps the church in bondage, and restricts the liberty of her members. On the contrary, it would not be very difficult to

prove that a written confession is essential to liberty. Let us remember that a church must have a confession either written or merely oral—that she must have some test, more or less comprehensive, of membership, and it will be at once evident that to have her confession written, public, and ascertainable by all who are within her pale, or may seek admission within it, affords just the same kind of security to personal liberty which a written and published code of laws does to the members of a commonwealth. It determines the position both of church-rulers and members, and preserves the freedom of both. It delivers them from individual caprice and tyranny by presenting to both a fixed standard of appeal. It is an ever memorable fact in church history, that the Church of Rome has dispensed with the use of a written confession of her faith.

It is time, however, that we should advert to the import of this first brief, though pregnant, Confession of Faith, which is so pleasing to the Lord. It comes from the lips of Simon Peter. It does not, indeed, express his faith peculiarly. It is the common faith of all the Apostles, but which he alone openly expresses. This is evident enough from subsequent and kindred passages in the Evangelists, as in the xviii<sup>th</sup> chapter of this gospel, for example, where the power of binding and loosing, which is here conferred upon Peter, is declared to belong to them all; and in that still more specific passage, John xx. 22, 23, in which Jesus finally gives the Apostles their commission as messengers of his will and as rulers in his church. It is by this confession that they as a body now stand out distinctly as members of an organised church, who, by means of that confession, are destined to diffuse the heavenly life and knowledge which they have received. They are dealt with by the Lord henceforth as having all made it, and on the



ground of it those blessings are pronounced, and those powers are conferred, which are the common property of them all. But Peter here, as indeed on various other occasions, stands forth prominently as the representative and organ of his fellow disciples. Not that he is above any of them in place or office, but that he is eminent among them for his energetic readiness and boldness in word and action. This eminence was conceded to him alike by his fellow disciples, and by the Jews among whom they lived. It was an eminence won for him by his natural temperament and gifts—as afterwards in still greater measure by the great things he accomplished in the Church. He, then, in the name of the other disciples and as representing them, now replies to the question of Jesus, “Whom say ye that I am?” His answer is short but most comprehensive. “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.”

In one respect there seems to have been nothing new in this confession. To say “thou art the Christ,” or, in the Old Testament language, the Messiah, was merely to repeat what he had believed and said on the first public appearance of Jesus, and before he had been even called to be a disciple. When the Baptist, on the day after the descent of the Holy Ghost on Jesus, had pointed him out to the disciples as the Lamb of God, we are told that one of them was Simon Peter’s brother Andrew, who came and said to him, we have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. There can be no doubt, therefore, that both Andrew and Peter then and from that time believed in Jesus as the Christ. What ideas they attached to the term it is not so easy to determine. Certainly, however, they were far from approximating to the truth in the matter, as their subsequent knowledge and conduct renders abundantly evident. It may be safely assumed that they understood

and believed no more regarding the Messias than fairly came up to the conceptions concerning him which were current among the Jewish people at the time. What these were we can only incidentally gather from what is recorded in the gospel history, and from the existing beliefs of the Jews. In the Messias, doubtless, they expected one who was to fulfil the threefold offices of prophet, priest, and king—emphatically the anointed, because combining in his own person these offices—one coming forth as the messenger of the Most High—of the royal lineage of David—the highest of the prophets, the most glorious of the kings—in whom was to be fulfilled the most blessed era, when vision was to be most perfect, and a friendly intercourse opened up and maintained between God and his covenanted people—in whom, above all, the kingdom was to be restored to Israel and a monarchy established, the glory and extent of which were but feebly foreshadowed in the great and prosperous empire of Solomon—one who should restore and establish the priesthood in its ancient honours and immunities, and who was himself in some eminent way to be a royal priest—in some such sense, perhaps, as Moses was called in the Psalms a priest. All this Andrew and Peter had from the beginning understood of Christ in owning him to be the Messias. How little influential their belief was may be inferred from the fact that, having once satisfied their curiosity, they returned to their occupations, apparently caring nothing more about the manifestation of him who was to come. Living under a shadowy dispensation, and failing to apprehend its typical character, the substance itself had become to them a shadow. Not perceiving the end of those things which they were appointed to observe under the Law, it was impossible they could truly apprehend him in whom that end was accomplished. The

temple service was to them a complete worship, not the symbol of a worship which really bore this character. Believing in the real efficacy of the blood of their sacrifices, they had lost the true sense of sin and their need of reconciliation, and all proper conception of a religion which was really spiritual, and the fruit of a conscience purged from dead works. Retaining and using the forms of speech which the Scriptures had taught, they understood them in a carnal sense, and so eliminated their true meaning. Christ was to them a prophet and priest in no higher sense than Moses had been, a king in the same sense in which the former rulers of the Jews and the present monarchs of the heathen were. He was not to them the way, the truth, and the life, for they felt as if they needed no manifestation of him in such a character. He was to be a man merely—the greatest of men—in wisdom and in power, but greater merely than Solomon or the Cæsars.

Nor were such perversions of the truth peculiar to them. It is no rare thing to receive the gospel in word and to deny it in power, to have an orthodox creed with an utter destitution of living faith. What is Christ to you? You could indeed tell more of his history than Andrew and Peter might have been able to do. You could more accurately define the nature of his offices, but is he after all to you more than he was at first to them? When you say he is a prophet, is he to you the truth—do you recognise and own him as something more and higher than the author of a wonderful revelation? Do you look to him for light and gratefully receive it at his hands? When you say he is a priest, is he to you the way? Have you found access to the Father through him, or is he merely the offerer of a more perfect and glorious sacrifice than those which were presented under the law? Have you life in him—the life of God—the

life which He bestows in the abundance of his grace, and in virtue of his resurrection,—a life consecrated to him, and whose pulsations emanate from his heart, a life which is yielded up unto him in its aspirations and affections, as the sovereign lord and ruler? This is always the test, not what you may say Christ is on the warrant of a hereditary faith, but what he actually has become to you. In what light do you personally apprehend him, in what relation do you stand to him? Is your creed a reality, or a word merely? Is Christ to you a living person, or merely a glorious name? It is vain to say that you have found the Messiah, if you have merely found the written word, a word which you can verify by external evidence as a true word. Have you ever truly sought him and waited for his appearing, and felt your need of his aid? Is your belief better than that of the Jews who crucified him? They, too, knew the form of sound words, but could find no verification of these words in Jesus. Have you found it,—found not merely that there is such a record of him, but that it is divinely true? Have you brought that word to the test of fact and experience, and found it a blessed reality? There is no true faith in Christ till this has been done. It must in every case, as in that of the Jews, be a matter of personal experiment. They, with the Bible in their hands, boldly set themselves to determine whether Jesus was the Christ. In the sense in which they understood and desired, they found him to be neither prophet, priest, nor king, and they put him to death as a blasphemer. In what sense have you found him to be what the Scriptures proclaim him to be? Is he in you fulfilling these offices, or is he to you also a false Christ, and do you crucify him afresh? The personal acceptance or rejection of him involves this alternative in your case as in theirs.

But while thus, in one particular, the confession of Peter is but a repetition of what he had confessed before, he has been making great progress in the school of Christ. Jesus is now to him not merely the Messiah, but the Son of God. This addition explains what he now means by the Messiah. It distinguishes his present faith from his former misconceptions. At first he saw in him only a distinguished man, the messenger of God, and specially furnished by him for the accomplishment of his special objects. He now owns him by that name on account of which the Jews thought him guilty of blasphemy. He is to the disciples no longer human, but divine,—not a messenger commissioned by God, but God himself in the person of Christ. This is a confession altogether new, and which showed that the apostles had now been elevated quite above the sphere of the Jewish conceptions. Taught by the Spirit of God, in the close intercourse which they had enjoyed with the Saviour, there had been opened up to them a view of his higher nature. He was not merely an anointed man, but the Immanuel—a personal manifestation of the Unseen—the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—the judge, the lawgiver, the king, and, therefore, the Saviour. For now also they perceived that the Redeemer, must not only be a messenger from God, but must be himself divine.

It is evident, indeed, from the immediately succeeding context that they did not yet apprehend the way and manner in which Jesus was to redeem his people—that their minds even revolted from the thought that he whom they recognised as God manifest in the flesh should give his soul as an offering for sin, and become obedient to the cursed death of the cross. So far their minds were still in the dark—but otherwise they had been elevated into a new region of divine light. They knew that Christ was the



Son of God, and that in the very fact of his tabernacling with men as he did, there was, in some way to them yet unknown, involved the idea of redemption. God was now with them in a near and friendly relation, owning them as his—admitting them to his fellowship, and bringing them under new and holy influences, whereby their minds had been enlarged and their affections renewed. With them old things had passed away, and all things had become new. The hope of the Jewish Church was centred on the restoration of the temporal kingdom to Israel, and the restoration of that which constituted its palladium—its true glory and strength, namely on the hope that once more when Messiah came, they should have a revelation by Urim and Thummin, and the awful glory radiating from above the Mercy-seat. But to these men the veil had already been rent asunder, and the way into the holiest was made manifest. They had already a privilege more elevated than belonged to the high-priests—they were ever in the presence of God, and in the view of his glory. How all this should be was not yet apparent to them, but to their unspeakable joy and gratitude they perceived that so it was. They recognised a reconciled and present God, before they apprehended the ground and reason of their reconciliation. It was God, and not merely a prophet of God, with whom they had been holding friendly intercourse—God assuming manhood, and therefore coming into the closest connection with it. Not a messenger telling them to raise and to reform themselves, but God descending to their state to lift them up into a divine fellowship.

In this brief confession then there are included those great truths which ever circle round the idea of redemption. More or less clearly in all its parts they knew now, what the Church has since known—that redemption in its highest

sense was not possible, in the way of man retrieving his own ruin, and rising by means of revelations and efforts into the condition of a new and heavenly life—that redemption lay in God himself, entering into and possessing their nature, dwelling in and transforming it.

This is a truth for us as for them. Have we apprehended,—do we know,—have we experienced it? Can we from the heart confess Christ the Son of God? In one respect, indeed, we are better informed than they. The crucifixion is now past. Our minds do not revolt at the idea of Christ suffering and dying. And as this death of Christ from our point of view is the grand central truth of religion, revealing the basis of the whole gracious procedure of God towards man, we are apt to imagine that, being possessed of and believing that truth, we occupy a higher position than they. It is not necessarily so. Theirs was after all the higher truth. The sacrifice was but the basis in justice and reason on which that truth rested. But in vain for us will be the confession and knowledge of the sacrifice, if we do not receive the higher and spiritual truth which is raised upon it—to know that provision has been made for our redemption, if the redemption itself be not actually ours. It was into this latter truth which the disciples had entered. They were brought into real fellowship with the Son of God. What to us is Jesus Christ except a human martyr, if it be not so with us also?—if through the apprehension of that death of his we do not come into personal fellowship and union with him, and reconciliation with God, and are not privileged really and individually to see the veil taken away, and be ourselves brought into the holiest of all. To us, as to them, is Christ the Son of God—the Immanuel?

Peter's confession embraces yet another element. He proclaims Jesus to be the Son of the *living* God. This

epithet here has no reference, as is often the case, to the contrast between the true God and dumb idols, but indicates Christ as a visible representation of the life of God—a real impersonation of the unseen—the fountain of life—the source of their own life—that strange life which they now felt stirring within them. They had been dead, living within the sphere of sense and time only, and clothing even the unseen with the attributes and conceptions which were proper to sense and time. But now, though still within that sphere, they have been elevated to a higher. They are no longer carnal but spiritual, and live by the powers of the world to come, and as seeing Him who is invisible. They are raised up to sit with Christ in the heavenly places, and recognise their identity with him, in their participation of his life.

And unto true believers, in every age, belongs the same high privilege. They are raised up to walk with Christ, and it is not they who live, but Christ who liveth in them. This is the blessed prerogative of faith, to establish and maintain our identity with Christ, to enter into and possess his life, and so to overcome the world. How glorious a thing it will be for each one of us if we are partakers of that life !

#### § V.—THE BLESSING.

“Blessed art thou,” says Jesus,—already blessed in the possession of what constitutes the highest blessedness. Thou art possessed of that knowledge and faith, in which consists true peace and the foundation of purity. In thee already the heavenly hath begun to triumph over the earthly, the blindness which the God of this world induces hath been

removed, and thou no longer walkest by sight but by faith. Through the veil of flesh and blood thou hast seen the divine glory, hast entered into the holiest, and, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, thou shalt be changed into the same image from glory to glory. Thou hast become one of a new priesthood who stand in God's presence, and present those sacrifices which were imaged forth in the beggarly elements of the dispensation which is about to pass away.

In speaking these words, Jesus does not now, for the first time, confer the blessing on Peter ; he merely proclaims his possession of it, and seals upon him by this word the assurance of it. The blessing was his from the moment he entered into that knowledge which was the source of it. It is a blessing which did not and could not subsist apart from the state of mind out of which it sprung. This necessarily is the characteristic and the condition of all spiritual blessings. It holds good of the blessings proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, just as it does in this one. These blessings do not stand apart from personal character, but are the fruit of it. It is true even of the final blessedness, which comprehends the fulfilment of all God's gracious promises, that it is necessarily associated with that elevation and purity of character which finds its proper development in the exercises and services and scenes of the heavenly places.

It is impossible otherwise to conceive of a blessing being truly possessed and enjoyed. What are called temporal blessings may be regarded as subject to the same universal law. The real enjoyment of them depends always on the relation in which they stand to the state and habitudes of the mind. Riches, worldly honours, and power, cannot gratify the soul which does not love them. It is after all the appetite of the soul, and its gratification, which make any-

thing the source of happiness. But it is emphatically true of the blessings which are spiritual, that they are involved in the state of the spirit. They cannot exist unless the mind be brought into the apprehension and appreciation of them ; and when the mind is in this state, the blessings are already there.

It is far from being true indeed that these blessings are the fruit of imagination and enthusiasm. It is well known that there are certain enjoyments, and these by no means of the lowest kind, which exist within the man himself—which are dependent upon nothing external—states of mind in which the soul environs itself in its own imaginings, and creates for itself an ideal world, amidst the scenes of which it revels with delight. In such a case, and in the strictest sense, the blessing and the state of mind are involved in each other, and are in fact the same thing. For the objects which the mind then contemplates, are all of its own creation and within itself, and pass away with the reverie which has produced them.

It is not at all in this sense, however, that spiritual blessings are involved in the state of mind of which they are the fruit. For the objects revealed to faith are not self-created. They exist apart from the mind and its apprehensions. Purity of heart, for example, does not create God—it is simply essential to the capacity of seeing him. Hunger and thirst after righteousness do not create the food which satisfies the spiritual appetite, but the food being divinely provided, and set in abundance before all who will eat it, hunger is the prelude to being filled. So it is in the fulfilment of all gospel promises ; that which the promise sets forth is already fully provided, set before men, ready to be appropriated, so that whenever the mind has been brought into harmony with the promise it is already fulfilled. Thus, while



we are speaking, God answers, yea, even prevents us with his goodness.

Thus it was with Peter, the blessedness of knowing Christ did not await the utterance of the text before being realized it was his from the time that the Father's teaching had taken effect upon his mind. In that revelation of the Messiah, when his soul apprehended Immanuel, the blessing was his. Jesus now proclaims that it is so. Thou art blessed, blessed in this present vision of, and fellowship with, the Son of the living God, not because Jesus had pronounced this word, but because he had been taught of the Father to know the revelation of the Son.

It is always important to bear in mind this principle, which obviously pervades the whole field of revealed truth. A blessing is not a word, nor an arbitrary appointment. It cannot in the nature of things be so. It is not an office, or a dignity, or any thing apart from its possessor. It is mine in the state of mind which realizes it. It is to me nothing apart from that. Evidently, then, this blessing was not the peculiar heritage of Peter—it must be the common property of all who have Peter's faith and knowledge. To apprehend Immanuel as he did is to possess his blessing. It consists in such an apprehension of the Christ and cannot be separated from it. The knowledge being mine, the blessing also is mine. The revelation by the Father ceasing, the blessedness terminates.

It is just at this point, I apprehend, and from utter ignorance of this grand principle, that the whole Popish error grounded on this passage takes its origin. According to the Popish belief, blessing and character are not involved in each other. It is essentially a religion of forms, and the peculiar isolation which Romanists seek for Peter in this passage is very much a fruit of their whole system—is at all events

in entire harmony with it, and necessary to its completeness. If the blessing and the state of mind must always co-exist, it is evidently impossible to distinguish Peter here from all true believers. The words of Jesus which sealed the blessing upon him, seal it also upon all, without exception, to whom the Father has revealed Jesus. It is a Christian felicity, belonging essentially to a truly Christian man. But Popery must ignore this divine truth, else it must revolutionize its whole system, which, throughout, is based upon a conception of an entirely opposite description, according to which, to be in the church is to be a Christian, to be baptized is to be regenerated, to partake of the eucharist is to be freed from all guilt—repentance is produced and expressed by flagellation, and all venial sins are finally purged away in the fires of purgatory. Thus also Popery has sought to convert those beyond her pale by imprisonment, torture, and the fires of martyrdom; and this is in entire harmony with her whole system, revealing to us the fearful truth that a religion of outward form, when it becomes ambitious or earnest, will be a religion which persecutes. Blessedness and graciousness according to it are produced by an agency working externally, and are the result of external position and privilege. To be saved is merely to obtain reconciliation with the Church. All that pertains to Christian character and peace is not the effect of a divine operation within, but is laid upon the man from without. The whole system is as irrational as it is anti-scriptural. The fundamental truth of religion is reconciliation, which not only presupposes a state of alienation and enmity, but involves a change of disposition,—the removal of a pre-existing enmity, and the renewal of the whole nature. It is a work carried on within the soul, and adapting it for the blessedness of fellowship with God. Without this change, such fellowship would not

merely be impossible, but a source of misery. The guilty from the beginning have hidden themselves from the presence of the Lord. And as it is with reconciliation so it is with every vital truth, and blessedness, and privilege of true religion. It is the mind—the soul—which is the subject of it. When the right state of mind has been produced, the promised blessedness is realized.

How much this is forgotten and overlooked among ourselves! The spirit of formalism is not peculiar to Popery, although there it is most fully developed, and systematically embodied as the truth in religion. Yet formalism has been wisely called the religion of human nature. Which of us has not felt its influence, and our need of wrestling against it? How many believe that they are safe because they are embraced within the membership of the church, and are partakers of its ordinances—who neither expect nor desire that change which is spoken of as the new birth, and the new creation. The blessing is not yours because ye hear and participate in that which is outward. The kingdom which is righteousness, and peace, and joy, is essentially a spiritual kingdom—a kingdom within you. It is the dominion of God in the soul,—the subjugation of it to Christ. To know him as Peter did is to become an heir of Peter's blessing. But that cannot be possessed without the state of mind of which it was the result and reward. Blessing is involved in character, and all the blessings of the Bible are yours, when it ceases to be merely an external word and testimony, by the Spirit writing it on the fleshly tablets of the heart.

Thus also you will see that the blessedness, the salvation, which the gospel offers, and promises, is not a thing of futurity, to be realized only on the confines of eternity, or within its hallowed precincts. It is a present salvation which never can be ours unless it is ours now. It is not a

thing of external position, but of inward experience. It was brought down to earth by Jesus Christ, and exemplified in his human nature. It becomes ours now, by our becoming partakers of his life, and by our fellowship in his sufferings. The blessedness of heaven itself flows from the perfection of that divine knowledge, and the consummation of that purity, both of which are the possession, in their measure, of believers now. There, as here, blessedness is indissolubly associated with character.

This was the case with Peter, and it must be so with us also.

The change essential to this blessedness is a divine work. This is announced in the text with remarkable distinctness. "Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in Heaven." Thou hast passed out of the sphere of the purely human, the domain of flesh and blood, and hast entered into the divine. It is not thy natural sagacity which has enabled thee, under this humble form, to recognise Immanuel. It is my Father who has unveiled to you this mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh. He has been dealing with thy mind, opening thine eyes, and giving thee that insight which thou hast proclaimed.

This need of divine illumination to apprehend that which is divine, is rendered evident by the state of humanity, as well as more abundantly by the testimony of Scripture. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. And in reference to the special revelation of the text, it is stated more emphatically still in the xith chapter of this gospel, ver. 27, "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." All saving knowledge of divine truth must be divinely

taught. It is not the property of flesh and blood to apprehend it. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." In this statement Paul gives a reason in philosophy for the truth of the text. We are cognisant of that which is like ourselves, which finds some counterpart in our own nature. We cannot know that which has nothing there corresponding to it. Man once knew God, but that was when he was in the image of God. Losing that image, he necessarily lost his knowledge also. Sin inevitably brought ignorance as well as corruption. When there was nothing of the divine in the soul, it could not apprehend that which was divine. The things of the Spirit are above the attainment of flesh and blood. In this respect also, then, this word must be true in us, as it was in Peter. If we know Christ as he did, we must have attained that knowledge by the same teaching as he. It is a knowledge which presupposes a renewal of our nature. In our case as in that of Paul, if we have any part in Christ, he has been revealed not merely *to* us, but *in* us. It is not indeed impossible for us—for flesh and blood—to understand the truths of the Bible, to remember its facts, to perceive the nature and harmony of its doctrines, and the manifestation which they give, at once, of the holiness and the love of God. But when we speak of knowing a man, we mean not merely that we know that he exists, and what he may have done and spoken; we mean that we have come into personal contact with him, and know what is in his mind and heart. We know him thus, reflexly from what we ascertain to be in our own mind and heart. But there is nothing of God in our mind and heart till God put it there; and to know Jesus Christ, therefore, it is necessary that we should be taught of God, and that



not merely by external revelation, and such testimony regarding him as the Bible gives, but, moreover, by inward adaptation, by the renewal of the mind into the likeness of God, by the creation within us of the divine life, which alone, in the full and proper sense, can know the divine. Hence always a state of divine knowledge implies a state of graciousness, and, as we grow in grace, we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It was to this knowledge that Peter had attained. The Father to him had revealed the Son—and he saw unveiled before him not merely the man Christ Jesus, but the Son of the living God—not merely a messenger from on high, but the embodiment of the invisible—not merely one proclaiming a covenant of peace, but one manifesting it in himself—the expression of the Father's love, the mediator in whom God and man already met and were reconciled. He knew thus what was in the mind and heart of the Father, who had now ceased to be to him an abstraction, and had become a living and personal God, with whom he could hold fellowship, whose voice he could hear, and unto whom he could truly pray. Entering into the mind of the Son, he could now know the Father, for no man knoweth the Father but the Son; and, enlightened by the Father, he could know the Son, for no man knoweth the Son but the Father. Already, therefore, he had entered into that rest which Jesus gives, and into which, by their possession of this knowledge, he invites all who labour and are heavy laden. Out of the darkness, then, let us come into this light. It is the region of peace and joy. Those who are in darkness are willingly so, for the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. Let us not be content with such a knowledge of Jesus Christ as flesh and blood can give us, the fruit of our own investigation and reflection. For this must be barren

of all fruit, and serves merely to transpose the heavenly into the form and mould of the earthly. The consummation of such a religion is, self-worship. For, instructed only by our own wisdom, our conceptions and knowledge of God are merely human. He is transformed into the fashion of our thoughts and feelings, and in worshipping Him we worship but the reflex image of ourselves. Let us seek to enter into a higher region. God will not withhold the Spirit from them who ask Him ; and He creating us into the image of God, we shall come to know what God is—and this is life-eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.

The divine teaching to which Peter was subjected, is further indicated to us in the epithet by which Jesus here addresses him. Blessed art thou Simon—Bar-jona. Jesus thus re-echoes the expression of Peter's faith. Thou, says the disciple, art the Son of the living God. Thou, says the Saviour, art Simon the son of Jonas—a genealogical designation indeed, in the first instance, but uttered here with a profounder meaning. These Hebrew names are always significant. Jonas means dove, and Jesus here glances at the appropriate import of the name, and says in substance—Thou, Simon, art a child of the Spirit—God, the Father of spirits, hath revealed himself to thee. Nor only this. When Jesus had been baptized in the Jordan, the Divine Spirit descended on him in the likeness of a dove—and this descent of the Spirit was the token whereby the baptist recognized him as the Christ, the lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world. Jesus by this sign was manifested to be the Son of God. He, too, in a sense was the Son of the Spirit. And now, in addressing Peter, he recalls this well-known and well-remembered symbol, to designate the position into which Peter had passed, by the divine gift of faith and

heavenly teaching. He also had become a son of the Spirit, and therefore the son of God. Jesus is not ashamed to call him a brother. In knowing Christ, he had become identified with him—not, indeed, like Christ, essentially divine—but yet a son of God.

On those of every age who possess this knowledge is this designation conferred. They are sons of the Spirit, and so of that seed which cannot die. Most blessed privilege! Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! Being taught of heaven, we become heirs of heaven. Knowing Christ, we appropriate his very life, and all things become ours. Come, then, O house of Jacob, and walk in the light of the Lord!

#### § VI.—THE NEW NAME.

Jesus, having blessed the disciple who had witnessed such a good confession, bestows upon him a new name, as a token and seal of the blessing which he had pronounced. On the occasion of Simon's first introduction to the Lord, he had intimated that this name would be conferred upon him. "When Jesus beheld him he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jonas: Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone." The time has now come for the fulfilment of this prediction. Simon is now in the position and possessed of the character which render it appropriate.

The bestowal of this new name on such an occasion is in entire harmony with the examples and precedents recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, and according to the analogy of God's dealings with his people from the beginning. Abraham received a new name, when in virtue of

God's gracious covenant with him, and the promises conveyed in it, he assumed a new position, and a public recognized relationship with the church of the future. Jacob, also, received a new name, when he obtained the blessing at the hands of the Angel of the Covenant, and was called Israel because, as a prince, he had power with God and with man, and had prevailed.

The name which Peter now received indicated his designation to a new office and function. It implied the assumption on his part of a new character, and was a proclamation of the change which had taken place in his condition as the result of his manifested faith. It was somewhat of the nature of a sacramental seal—an appropriate accompaniment, at least of such a seal. In harmony with this view, and springing from the divine examples furnished in the case of the Patriarchs, it became the universal practice among the Jews, to give a new name to their offspring on the occasion of their circumcision. In that sacred rite they were publicly owned and recognised as members of the church, and in covenant with God, and they then received the name whereby they were henceforth to be known among men. The same practice is still preserved in the administration of the ordinance of baptism in the Christian church. In its own nature the practice is peculiarly significant, however much its real import may be practically lost sight of. It is an external token that the baptised person, now owned as a member of the church, is admitted to the blessing of God's gracious covenant. It is a solemn designation of the party so named as a child of God, and implies an obligation on his part to be the servant of God. It is not strictly a sacramental seal, but something superadded, to give that seal a still more emphatic significance. The giving of the name, indeed, does not necessarily imply regeneration and

faith, far less does it bestow these sacred gifts, but, along with the seal of the covenant itself, it is bestowed on the assumption, that they are already possessed, or confirmed by promise to the party receiving it, and in virtue of the relation in which he stands to his believing parents. Hence has arisen, in some degree, the custom in the Christian church of the members of it giving to their children the name of some one of their ancestors. For the recognition of infants as members of the church, proceeds upon the assumption of their entering into the rights and privileges of their progenitors, and in this view there is an obvious propriety in their bearing their name. The custom is one which is peculiar to the church—entirely a Christian one. It obtains no place among the practices of heathen nations. Among them the specific distinguishing name of a man does not depend on relationship, but on some personal characteristic. Baptised children receive an ancestral name, as presumed inheritors of the ancestral blessing.

In the case of Peter, as in that of Jacob, the new name is bestowed by the Lord himself. There is here, therefore, no uncertainty as to its real connection with him who received it. It is an indication not of what Peter was assumed to be, but of what he had actually become. Yet there is not in his case anything absolutely peculiar. It is true, indeed, that we cannot find its perfect parallel in the human administration of divine ordinances, and in the names that are given upon the mere knowledge and faith of man. But the Lord himself deals in the same way with every true believer and confessor of his name, as he did with Peter. Thus he says, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Peter received his new name as a member



and apostle of the visible church, and the name was therefore published. Believers receive theirs simply as children of God—as belonging to that family which in heaven and earth is named of Jesus Christ—as members of the Church invisible. But the relationship in which both he and they stand to God, is indicated by the same process, and it proclaims them as standing on the same platform.

The import of the name is sufficiently manifest. The text connects itself necessarily with the antecedent prediction of Jesus at the commencement of his ministry, “Thou shalt be called Cephas,” which is synonymous with the Greek term which Jesus now employs—petra—both words signifying a stone. When he says, therefore, “thou art Peter,” it is equivalent to his saying, “thou art a stone.” The name is a characteristic and distinguishing one—equally so as in the case of Abraham and of Jacob of old. It described with sufficient accuracy the relation in which Peter was to stand to the Church; and, moreover, by a significant symbol it revealed the church which Jesus was now founding as that to which ancient prophecy had pointed as the kingdom which was to endure for ever. “And in the days of these kings,” says Daniel, “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God hath made known to the king what shall happen hereafter.” The new and everlasting kingdom, then, had as its recognised symbol a stone, and now, in founding that kingdom, Jesus adopts the ancient symbol, and unfolds to the disciples and to us, the real

meaning of his present words and act. Here is the beginning, the first germ of that mighty kingdom which was to extend its sway over the whole earth. This is the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw in vision, which smote the image upon the feet and brake them in pieces, and which became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Nor is the name without significance when viewed in the light of New Testament prophecy. It has a recognisable connection also with its symbolic language. Believers have their new name written in a stone. There is throughout an identity, for the church is one. Peter in his new character as a stone does not stand isolated and alone. He who was cut out of the mountain without hands—separated from the rude and perishable mass of humanity, not by human agency and device, but divinely fashioned and instructed—was the representative of the whole church. In him was the germ of that life and power which was to be diffused through all her members, who were in their turn to be dealt with even as he was. To them pertains the same nature—to them is given the same victory of faith over sense—and the same honour awaits them all. They also obtain a new name and it is written in stone. The Lord is here performing a representative act—not dealing with the case of Peter exclusively, but setting forth in his person what he was to do always in the establishment of his kingdom—in the up-building of his church.

In order to make this still clearer, let us remember, that the Old Testament Temple was a type of the Christian church, with its high-priest and sacrifices, its service and ministry, as indeed the Tabernacle in the Wilderness is declared to have been. The old was a shadow of the new and true tabernacle. The church, therefore, as well as each individual believer, is characteristically described as a temple—a

sacred building—an habitation of God. They are frequently spoken of under this symbol. Thus the apostle Paul, speaking to believers, says, “Ye are God’s building ;” and again, “Ye are the temple of the living God.” Or, still more specifically, the apostle Peter says : “Ye, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” It is under the same figure of speech that Jesus here speaks to Peter. “Thou art a stone, and on this stone (rock) I will build my church.” Thou art in the foundation of this sacred edifice—the first stone laid in a glorious and everlasting temple—even as other lively stones shall hereafter be built on thee ; you and they having the same life—all fashioned by the same agency, and fulfilling essentially the same functions.

The interpretation of the text is evidently inadmissible which represents the Lord as pointing to himself when he said, “upon this rock I will build my church.” It is not only an unnatural hypothesis, but moreover destroys that connection which is so evidently designed between the new name of Peter, and the building of the church. Throughout Jesus is speaking to Peter. It was he who made the confession—on him is pronounced the blessing—and to him belongs all that is implied in it. He is the stone—the rock on which Jesus is to build his church. Yet these gracious words are not spoken to Simon the fisherman of Galilee—but to Peter as a man taught of God, and solely as the subject of that heavenly instruction, and so having in him the seed of an imperishable life. On this new name of thine, on this spiritual divine life in thee, I will build my church.

The common interpretation of the text, therefore, is substantially the correct one, which represents the building as

resting, not on Peter's person, but on the good confession he had made. Only it is not so much the confession which forms the foundation of the structure, as that divine grace in Peter which prompted the confession. It is not a creed merely which lies at the foundation of the church, but a creed embodied and engraven on fleshly tablets, and giving utterance to itself out of a renewed and quickened soul. Regarding the Lord's utterance in this aspect, it becomes needless to vindicate it from the Popish glosses, which represent Peter, as by this word, constituted the head of the church, and which infer its infallibility. It is but too evident that he was not infallible, nor does his future history, as recorded in the Scriptures, leave us any room to allege that he either possessed or claimed any supremacy over his fellow disciples.

Still farther, it is important to observe that there is nothing here peculiar to Peter. The Lord, in thus speaking to him, is announcing a universal truth, which was to hold good in the whole future history of the church. He, the first confessor, is laid as a lively stone in the foundation of that building which the Lord is about to rear. The divine life being imparted to him, he becomes the means instrumentally of imparting it to others. He, a gracious soul, communicates to others the grace he has himself received. But it is in this manner that the church is being built from generation to generation. Every lively stone in the building becomes in its turn a foundation for the future superstructure—a rock on which the Lord builds his church. It is through the life imparted to some that it is conveyed to others, and the Lord builds his church, not by the written testimony of his own word only, but by that testimony as inscribed on believing hearts, by living epistles to be known and read of men. Thus all the members of the church are connected

with each other, and in their several places discharge essentially the same functions, because all of them are fashioned by the same unseen hand, and are possessed of a common life derived from Christ. The various stones of the building are thus cemented into unity.

In stating this truth, however, it may be necessary to guard against an error into which there is a tendency to fall, when the church is viewed in this aspect.

The error to which I refer is the doctrine of apostolical succession. This doctrine, as expounded by its advocates, implies that a church cannot be a true church of Christ which is unable to establish the fact, that its ministry has a lineal descent from the apostles—that is to say, that each successive generation of ministers has been ordained by an antecedent one—having thus transmitted by a living agency the life and prerogatives which belonged to the apostles, and which they received by the gift of the Holy Ghost. The idea which the text suggests of an apostolical succession, is widely different from this. Neither ministers nor other believers are so separated from Jesus Christ and his apostles. It is not an immediately preceding race of men who form the foundation on which my faith is built. That which belonged to Peter belongs also to me. His confession is not dead, and the word which the Lord spoke to him is a word that endureth for ever. There is nothing which interposes between me and that confession. I can, by the same divine teaching as he enjoyed, take it up and make it mine, and appropriate to myself these gracious words of the Lord. The apostles and others have indeed preceded me in their witness-bearing, but I am made a stone in the building no otherwise than they were. Every true believer, therefore, is, in a sense, and that the only important one, a successor of the apostles. The church is



built not upon the testimony and acts of men, but upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

### § VII. THE BUILDER.

Jesus has set forth Peter as the representative of that kingdom which he had come to establish upon the earth, the first public confessor of the faith of Christ, and therefore in the foundation of that glorious temple which he was to raise for an habitation of God through the Spirit. He was a stone cut out—separated by that confession from the community of ordinary men—a stone, as the emblem and representative of that mass which was to become a mountain, and to fill the whole earth,—on which so many other living stones were to be laid, until the whole edifice should be completed, and He whose building it was should bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, grace, grace unto it. In the example of Peter he has also indicated how the church is to be formed and to grow. Peter, by divine teaching, had verified the prediction regarding him. Not by the revelation of flesh and blood, but by the will and revelation of God, he had become Cephas, even as all the living stones in that edifice should in the progress of time become such,—should receive in their place and order this new name, in virtue of the same heavenly teaching which he had received, and the confession of the Saviour which that teaching would be sure to evoke.

Having thus exhibited the character and position of Peter in the church, he now proceeds to indicate his own office and work in reference to it. Here, in the person of the first professed believer, was the foundation of the edifice laid

The structure, which was throughout to be of the same substance and material, was now begun, a pledge and assurance that, one day, it would be gloriously finished, for he announces himself as the builder. "On this rock will I build my church." Its progress and completion are not dependent on the weakness or the strength of man. He now has laid the foundation, and it is he who is to complete the edifice.

The church of which he is the builder is, in the strictest sense, the living, spiritual church, consisting of all whom the Father should teach and bring to the Saviour, but not, on that account, the less, that church which should exist among and be seen of men. The church visible, indeed, does not consist exclusively of those who are true believers. It consists of those who confess Christ, and credibly profess their faith in him. The church which Christ personally builds consists only of those who in heart and life are his. On the walls of the divine temple men in their ignorance and sin, heap many useless and perishable materials—wood, and hay, and stubble. The church outwardly and formally, therefore, is not co-extensive with the church which is the habitation of God through the Spirit. The former is to a greater or less extent the building of man, the latter is the building of the Lord. But the one is comprehended in the other. The one consists of those who make a true confession; the other of those who credibly profess faith in Christ. The church formal therefore always embraces the church divine and real, and the life of the Spirit manifests itself within the pale of the visible church.

When Jesus announces that he is the builder of the church, he proclaims himself its creator and author. To him and to no other it owes its existence—its character, its immunities. Above all human instrumentality, and alone giving efficacy to it, the Lord is ever verifying the purpose

which he now announces, in the history of the church. He does not set forth Peter or any human agent as the builder of that glorious temple. Peter has been laid as a stone of the structure, in the very foundation of the building. It is Christ himself that is the efficient agent in erecting this house of God. Not that Peter and other believers have no part to act. They are not dead, but living stones. Through them the life of Christ permeates, and is infused into the inert dead masses which are found in the mountain, from which the stones of the temple are taken. But the life which is thus imparted is Christ's life. Believers are merely the channels through which it is communicated. He is the builder. The church is his creature. Every lively stone in its walls is there, because he has so placed it. It has been hewn and fashioned by him, and fitted for the place it is to occupy, and the purpose it is designed to serve. It is a partaker, not of Apostolic, or other Christian life, but of the life of Jesus. It is rightly placed upon the wall, in virtue of its possession of this divine life. Each believer occupies the same relation to Christ as that in which Peter stood, and is possessed of the same character. He forms part of the edifice, not, as taught by man, as the follower and servant of men—as made intelligent and zealous by a mere human agency—but as a stone, in the same sense in which Peter was—as a partaker of the divine life, as one who has heard and learned of the Father, and so has come to Christ, and is in living and immediate union with him.

In thus laying the first stone in the foundation of the temple, Jesus acknowledges and proclaims the agency of the Father. The building is divine, but it is not the work of any of the persons of the Godhead exclusively. The Father has revealed Christ to Peter, and so he believes and confesses his faith, and the church of Christ begins to exist

The sacred temple to be reared is the result of a covenant between the Father and the Son, towards the accomplishment of which they both co-operate. It was thus in the spiritual history of Peter, and it is so always. It was by the Father that this stone was cut out of the mountain, and so it is evermore. "No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him, and every one that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." Yet, in the first movement of this gracious power of the Father, the work of Christ is assumed and implied. It is on the ground of his covenanted work of obedience unto death that the Father lays hold on, and draws the sinner. It is to the Saviour he is drawn. This is his landing place, as it is the source of his life. It is because Christ obeyed and died that he is cut out and separated from the mass of human sin and corruption—made one of a peculiar people, not by human, but by divine, agency—he is cut out without hands.

The kingdom of Christ, therefore, is, in the very fullest sense, not a kingdom of this world. It did not originate on earth, but in the counsels of eternity. It is not the fruit of human wisdom and policy, but of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is not maintained by human strength and resources, but by the creative and renovating Spirit. It is, therefore, not temporary, but everlasting. Not partaking of the destiny of the world-kingsdoms, but surviving them all. Its laws are not of the earth, and fluctuating with the manifold changes of time and the exigencies to which they give rise. It exists not for earthly objects, and to subserve mere human interests, but for ends worthy of its glorious and immortal destiny. The power which it exercises is not over man's temporal estate, but within the higher and nobler sphere in which the spirit moves and acts. Nor

is its king a human potentate, but He who sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and who uses the earth as his footstool.

Possessing such a character and destiny, it is not identical with any worldly state or commonwealth, nor amalgamated with any worldly kingdom. It is diverse from them all, and destined ultimately to break them all in pieces. It is neither the creature of the State, nor subject to its control, nor dependent on its countenance and patronage, nor regulated by it in its constitution and administration, nor governed by its laws. It is essentially divine, in its inner life, which is indestructible, because it is the life of God—in the laws to which it is subject, which have been all written by the finger of God, and are utterances of divine wisdom—in the power by which it is maintained and propagated, which is the power by which men are turned from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God. Its true subjects are taken from under the servitude of the world, and made the servants of another master.

It is not a voluntary association—a combination of men united for the accomplishment of certain objects, and is not the creature, therefore, of human will and caprice. Its true members have not only escaped from the domination of the law of carnal commandments, but have surrendered their own will to that of God. It is independent of men that it may be solely dependent on God. It is not under the guidance of human wisdom, but of the counsels of the Eternal. Its members walk not in the light of their own eyes, but the law of God is a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. It is elevated into a region above the earth, and lives under the shadow of the Almighty. It moves and acts in a higher region of light and knowledge—in the radiance of which the wisdom of this world is shown to be



foolishness. It ceases to be a kingdom of Christ—a temple of the living God—just in so far as it ceases to be animated by the divine life, and to be governed by the divine laws. It is not an organised society, assuming such forms as men please to assign to it, but is planned as the temple of old was. Christ is its builder—"I will build." When men build they but mar the beauty and harmonious proportions of the divine structure.

Christ claims this church as his own, when he announces himself as its builder. "I will build *my* church." It is his property, the heritage which he has created for himself. It is his by a double right. It is his because it is his building. It is his because it is his purchase. It is the possession which he hath bought with his blood, and by the travail of his soul. Hence is derived his sole right to rule over it and to legislate for it. It is no farther a church, in the proper sense of the term, than as it occupies this close and vital relation to him—as given up and dedicated to him, and, in virtue of its possession of the divine life, acting out his will, and living for him and by him.

It will not do to plead that while all this may be true of the church invisible—of the true saints who are here and there scattered over the earth, and who are in vital union with Christ—it does not hold good of the visible church and its organisation and laws. It must be true of the church as visible and organised, unless it has become apostate. In so far as it is a church it is under the ministration of the Spirit, and conformed to the law and life of Christ. That which is law to the hidden members of his body must also be the law to those who are associated and organised in his name. The rule which is obligatory upon the true members of the church is the rule obligatory upon those who confess the name of Christ. This must hold true unless a

church is to become antichristian, and to act against the Master whom it professes to serve. But it ceases to be a kingdom of God at all, when it is separated from Christ and is pursuing its own worldly ends. This must ever be, therefore, the practical and decisive test of a true church of Christ: Is it acting for God, and in subordination to his will? Does it confess Christ, and yield obedience to him?

And this also is the practical and decisive test for the individual members of the church. The true position of a member is not determined by the relationship in which he stands,—by the company with which he is associated, but by something far higher and more vital. What divine knowledge and life is there in me, and how are they manifested? I may be next the truest saints, and yet be myself the vilest sinner. Do I know Christ? Am I walking in fellowship with him? Is he living in me? Have I yielded myself up to his authority?

We have already adverted to that which constitutes the foundation of the church, and a few words additional will suffice to bring out fully the meaning of the Lord when he said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Upon this rock I will build—that is, on the divine life and knowledge imparted to, and now manifesting themselves in, Peter, the centre and source of which I am,—not on a creed, merely, however true, but on a creed embodied—engraven on fleshly tablets, giving utterance to itself out of a renewed and quickened soul. This is the imperishable foundation. And of the same material also the walls of the building are composed. The foundation and the superstructure are homogeneous. It is one living temple,—not built up of written confessions, but of these as engrafted into the life and transforming it,—Peter and the believer of our own day differing merely in their relative position in the structure.

This living, actual trust in Christ, and confession of him, constitute the foundation and superstructure of the edifice. The true church is composed of such stones. It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

From this stable and solid foundation it is ever the tendency of human nature to remove. The carnal mind does not apprehend the truth and value of that which is spiritual, and so it looks for the stability and security of a church, not in that which is divine, but in that which is human. The world practically believes itself eternal, and that the divine is temporary, and so it looks for worldly defences and securities, rather than the salvation which is for walls and bulwarks around Zion. This tendency has been the source of most of the errors which have disturbed the peace and corrupted the purity of the church. It behoves us to watch against this insidious tendency, remembering that "the Lord is our defence, and the Holy One of Israel is our king."

#### § VIII.—THE IMPREGNABLE BUILDING.

Jesus having represented himself as the builder and the church as his property, for that reason now asserts its invincibility and perpetuity. He does this under a form of expression highly figurative. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Hell is here opposed to heaven. The church is the kingdom of heaven. That which is here designated as hell includes everything that is hostile to that kingdom, and that seeks

its overthrow and destruction. In laying the foundations of his kingdom, Jesus at once announces that it would be an object of dislike and hostility—that there would be powers seeking to prevail against it. Though a kingdom not of this world, it is a kingdom existing within it—a kingdom not fashioned after the mould of worldly kingdoms, nor existing for the ends they sought to accomplish, and therefore necessarily exciting their jealousy and provoking their aggression. Sooner or later there must be a collision between them, for the stone cut out of the mountain was destined to break them in pieces.

There is in the text, however, no express reference to this conflict between the church and the world, between Christ and Cæsar. Jesus at once transfers the scene of the conflict from the region of the sensible to the region of the spiritual. He brings before the minds of the disciples, not the subordinate actors in it, but he who instigates all warfare against the church. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickednesses in high places.” It is always, virtually, a conflict between Christ and Satan, when the church is oppressed and persecuted. As manifested to the senses, indeed, it is a conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. But really, and in the highest sense, it is a battle between heaven and hell. And because it is so, the church is shielded in the day of battle, and must ultimately be victorious. He who dwells in his people, and reigns in this kingdom of heaven, is already a conqueror. He hath spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross. His subjects, therefore, are called to fight against an enemy already vanquished, and they are kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation.

Yet the opposition they have to encounter is by no means insignificant. Hell is represented as a strongly fortified city, having gates and bulwarks, and all the necessary munitions of war. It is, indeed, an enemy so powerful, that only Christ can successfully oppose it. It has subdued to itself all human intelligence and power, and but for the presence and gracious operation of the Spirit of Christ, would retain them for ever under its dominion, or even, when emancipated, bring them again under its sway. How powerful an enemy hell and its monarch was, Jesus himself felt in the days of his humiliation; and his people in many ways are made to feel it still. It is Satan who animates and fortifies all the church's enemies, and that subtle spirit has access to the soul itself to assail and torment it by his evil suggestions.

But the word "gates" is not only suggestive of strength, it also indicates the wisdom and policy by which hell and its agencies would attempt to prevail against the kingdom of heaven. The gates of a city were not only fortresses, but places of council and judgment. Boaz, of old, went to the gate of Bethlehem, to have the question regarding his inheritance determined. It is said in the book of Proverbs that "the husband of the virtuous woman shall be known in the gate when he sitteth among the elders of the land." In the place of Israel's captivity, Mordecai, who was exalted to honour, is represented as having "sat daily in the king's gate." Absalom went to the gate of Jerusalem to hear and to determine causes, and won thereby the hearts of the people to himself. In this sense also hell assaults the kingdom of heaven with its gates. Satan aims at its destruction by policy as well as by force. The former weapon has, indeed, been proved in the history of the kingdom to be the most dangerous and deadly. The people of Christ, who have courageously resisted the assaults of



violence have been often vanquished by the more subtle weapon which Satan employs against them. They are induced to surrender themselves to the guidance of a carnal policy—of the wisdom of this world. They are thus denuded of their strength, and become the prey of the destroyer.

But as in the struggle of open warfare the heavenly kingdom has a stronger Captain than the hosts of hell, so in the trial of skill it has a wiser leader. As the power of God is stronger than man or Satan, so the wisdom of God is wiser than both. In Christ the church is always safe. He is a refuge and strength to his people, a very present help in every time of trouble. Dwelling under the shadow of his wings, their enemies cannot hurt them. But the security of the building depends on the presence of the builder. He is the light and saving strength of his people. The gates of hell cannot prevail against him, and therefore cannot prevail against his kingdom. His salvation is to its subjects for walls and bulwarks. It is in troublous times, indeed, that he builds the walls of Zion—for there are many adversaries—but the walls are built, notwithstanding, and will one day be gloriously finished. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

On this promise or prediction, for it may be regarded in either aspect, the Papists have founded the doctrine of the infallibility and perpetuity of the Church of Rome. It is obviously illegitimate to deduce from it such an inference. The promise cannot be thus restricted to a place or a class of men. There are circumstances connected with the founding of Christ's kingdom which demonstrate that this cannot be the meaning of the promise, and which should have precluded, in all future time, such a presumptuous conclusion.

For, let us observe what it is that Christ is now doing.

There is a church whose seat is in Jerusalem—a church of high pretensions—of patriarchal descent, to which pertained the giving of the law and the covenants. But he is founding a church outside the Jewish—formally setting it aside, and constructing another. That church has ceased to be a habitation of God, and has become a synagogue of Satan—has become the church's enemy and persecutor—the instrument and agent of quite another than God, and personifying the gates of hell. He is raising up a church and people to bear witness against it—a church composed of men who were thrust out of its synagogues, and excommunicated from its fellowship. But to the Jewish church had been given promises as comprehensive and as absolute as were ever given to the Christian church. There is not an argument which can be employed on behalf of the infallibility and perpetuity of the Christian church in the sense in which Romanists understand and interpret these terms, which could not be used with still greater force and conclusiveness on behalf of the church at Jerusalem. In the only true and legitimate sense these promises have been made good in the experience of both churches. God has not violated his promises to Abraham and to his seed; but the promise from the first was not to the seed according to the flesh, but according to faith. Jerusalem has been destroyed, and her inhabitants scattered abroad, because they forsook the faith of their fathers. But the father of the faithful has a progeny as numerous as the stars of heaven—not of Jewish extraction indeed, but the heirs of Abraham's faith. It was by faith the Jewish Church stood, and by their want of it they fell. So it is still. "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear." So wrote the Apostle Paul of old to the church of Rome, revealing wherein their true strength lay, and in-

dicating at least the possibility of their fall. It is a lesson which they have sadly forgotten, and have, therefore, fallen so deeply. Like Jerusalem of old, the persecutors of the saints represent themselves as the only true saints and servants of Christ.

But while thus by guile and by force, the gates of hell may seem to prevail, the church is notwithstanding perpetual and infallible, for it stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. The promise of God is not limited to race and locality. Whatever communities and individuals may fall away from the truth, Christ will always have, as in time past he has had, a church on earth. Satan never will succeed in exterminating the church. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Nay, we know, on the sure promise of the word, that it will be universally and gloriously triumphant, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Satan does not even succeed in displacing one stone which the builder has placed upon the walls of his temple. But the church has no inheritance as of the flesh—no limitation as to its locality. The Jewish church of old fell. And thus also it happened to the Christian church which was planted and once flourished at Jerusalem. So fared it with the church at Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians, and with that at Ephesus, and Corinth, and Thessalonica ; and so finally and most signally it fared with the church of Rome, which has opposed and exalted itself above all that is called God and is worshipped.

Nor does this truth militate against the doctrine of the visibility of the church. That which has been since realized in the history of the Christian church, was verified and shadowed forth in its very infancy. When Jesus was standing among his disciples in this region of Caesarea

Philippi, where and what was the church visible? Was it at Jerusalem? Or did it consist of the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees, who, instead of being builders of the temple, rejected the headstone of the corner? The true as well as the visible church, was that which Jesus has been founding in that remote region. And so it is always. The character of the church is determined, not by the number of its members, nor by the locality in which they are found. The true church is known by its faith—its submission to Christ—its practical obedience to his will.

#### § IX. THE POWER OF THE KEYS.

Having defined the position of Peter in the church, Jesus now determines the functions he is to discharge. He is, in a living temple, a living stone. To him, therefore, belongs action, trust, responsibility. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Because the church is a kingdom of heaven, its laws are heaven's laws. That confession which Peter made was not a mere word passing from him, and into the void air. It was a word which killed or quickened—a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. It was an enduring word remaining in Peter, which had an efficacy both on earth and heaven. By the word of Christ, and the light and knowledge of heaven dwelling in him, he binds and looses, saves and destroys. By men's reception of and obedience to that word, their eternal destinies were to be determined. It is a solemn and awful trust he has received in being thus taught of God, and in, therefore, becoming a

teacher of God's truth to others. He is invested with a power which he might well tremble to use, and which he could only use aright in the closest fellowship with God, and in the light reflected upon him from heaven. What do this trust and power imply?

X The doctrine of the Papists on this subject is, that the power of authoritative efficacious absolution or forgiveness of sins is a function of the Christian priesthood. They affirm that this power was conferred upon Peter, and is through him possessed by those who succeed him in the priestly office. In examining this doctrine, we observe in the first place, that the power of forgiveness is not a priestly power or function at all. It never was so, and in the nature of the case it cannot be so. Heb. v. 1 defines a priest to be one "ordained for men in things pertaining to God that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin." The priesthood involves the functions of mediation and atonement, but not that of forgiveness. The Levitical priesthood accordingly did not forgive sin—they simply offered sacrifices as an atonement for it. Even Christ himself in his priestly character did not forgive sin. When he forgives he acts as Lord. Pardon is always an exercise of sovereignty, and is incompatible with the functions of mediation and atonement.

But, secondly, the Christian ministry is not a priesthood at all, so that even if priests had the power of forgiveness, it would not follow that this function pertained to the Christian ministry. They are never described in the New Testament as priests—a thing which is inconceivable on the supposition that they really were priests, for the writers of the New Testament books were not ignorant of the nature and functions of a priesthood. On the contrary, they had never known or heard of a religion without it. But they never call any of the office-bearers of the church priests.



Still farther, no priestly function is ever ascribed to Christian ministers. The functions of the priest, according to apostolic definition, are mediation and atonement—mediation between parties otherwise mutually inaccessible, and atonement by the presentation of an expiatory sacrifice. But such mediation and atonement the New Testament never ascribes to Christian ministers.

Again, the Scriptures represent Christ himself as the only priest of his people, who, by the one offering of himself, has superseded and abolished all other atonement—who has no successor in that office, because he is a priest for ever—and who, by his own mediation, has given to each believer boldness to come to a throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy and find grace to help him in the time of need.

Christian ministers are not priests *under* Christ as the Levitical priests were. They were types indicating him who was to come. But now that he has come, there is nothing to prefigure, or even to recall, for Christ is an everlasting priest, and perpetually present with his people.

Christian ministers are not even mediators specially appointed to bring men to Christ, as Christ himself brings men to God. For the Scriptures uniformly teach that we may come to Christ without any mediator at all, and they hold forth the freeness of immediate access to the Saviour, without any intervention as one of the gracious peculiarities of the gospel. “If *any man* thirst, let him come *to me* and drink.”

The Scriptures declare the Christian minister to be something entirely different from a priest. Ministers are spoken of as the messengers, and heralds of salvation, teachers, watchmen, rulers, overseers, shepherds. “Feed my sheep—feed my lambs.” “Christ sent me to preach the gospel.” “Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom *ye* believed?” &c.

The grant of the power of remission, or of binding and loosing, was not made to the Christian ministry. In interpreting our text, it must be regarded as parallel with Matt. xviii. 18, and John xx. 23, as, indeed, it is universally admitted to be. These passages, therefore, must be considered as all teaching the same doctrine, whatever that may be found to be, and this not only in regard to the nature of the grant, but to the persons on whom it was bestowed. Our text would seem to indicate that this power was conferred on Peter individually, and possibly by inference on his personal successors. But this limitation disappears when, from Matt. xviii. 18, we learn that the same power was bestowed upon the disciples generally. And that this does not mean the apostles exclusively, we learn again by comparing John xx. 23 with Luke xxiv. 33, which shews that Christ's words, as recorded by John, were addressed to the eleven, *and to those who were with them*. The power of remission, then, granted by the Saviour, was a power given to believers generally.

The same inference is deducible from Matt. xviii., which presents us with one continuous discourse, in which Jesus teaches, first, the necessity of conversion, then the sin of offending those who believe in him, and then the method of dealing with offenders, first in private, then before two or three witnesses, and then before the church; and all this is followed up directly by the assurance that their decisions would be ratified in heaven—an assurance founded on the promise, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, He is in the midst of them. Now, in all this there is nothing peculiar to the apostles. The necessity of conversion, the duty of avoiding offences, and of private dealing with offenders, are duties common to believers. And when it comes to public dealing, the com-

mand is to tell it to the church, and hence the promise must be held as made to the church.

The power in question and the gift of the Holy Ghost are inseparably connected. But the gift of the Spirit is not confined to Christian ministers, but is conferred upon believers at large, as is evident in the history of the Corinthian church, and in the case of those to whom Peter preached in the house of Cornelius. This was true both of the ordinary and of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. If the power of remission, then, is connected with the gift of the Spirit, and arises from His presence, it must belong to all in whom the Spirit dwells,—in other words, it does not belong to the ministry as such, but to believers.

The same conclusion is inevitable, when we examine the apostolic practice. There is no instance of remission of sins by the apostles as such, and in right of their office. We never read of men confessing their sins unto them, and receiving absolution or forgiveness at their hands.

But, finally, it is denied that the power of absolute effectual forgiveness is bestowed at all in this gift of Christ. The acknowledged facts that pardon is an act of sovereignty, and that none can in the strict sense forgive except him against whom the offence has been committed, create a strong presumption against the sense put on the text and cognate passages of Scripture, which should lead us to demand the clearest and most indubitable evidence that they bear such a meaning. We do not indeed deny the possibility of the delegation of such power, or the possibility of its being delegated to Christian ministers, and if the fact has been proclaimed by God himself, we would be constrained to admit it. But we are destitute of such conclusive evidence. The interpretation put by Romanists upon our text is far from being the only one the words will bear.

That the power to remit sins may mean something less than the power absolutely and authoritatively to pardon them, is admitted even by Romanists themselves. They admit that they may mean, nay, that they here include, declarative and precatory absolution, that is, the setting forth of the terms of pardon and prayer for forgiveness. That this is their true meaning here is evident. It is plain from the connection that the power bestowed is twofold, that of authoritative teaching, and that of authoritative judgment. By virtue of the former the church was to act as a witness of the truth, simply to proclaim the doctrines of the word ; by virtue of the latter, to apply these doctrines to the case of individuals, and by them to bind and loose, to open and shut, to receive into the church, and to exclude from it. And this conclusion is confirmed by the actual practice of the apostolic churches. The sense in which Christ's words were understood by his disciples is determined by the way in which they acted upon them. We find them, then, simply preaching the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sins, and the doctrine that faith in Christ secured forgiveness at the hands of God, to whom the power and the act of pardon are always and immediately ascribed.\*

Having thus considered negatively what this power and prerogative promised to Peter is not, we proceed now to consider positively what the power is which Jesus in these words bestows. In ecclesiastical language it has been designated, from the language used in this passage, the power of the keys. It is the keys of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus here says he will give to Peter. The function which he is to exercise with these keys is that of binding and

\* The above argument has been very ably and conclusively handled in a paper in the Princeton Theological Essays, of which, indeed, the above is little else than a brief abstract.

loosing. There is an apparent incongruity in the figure that is here employed, which has its origin in the fact that in ancient times doors were usually fastened by tying. To fasten the tie or to unloose it was the same thing as to open and shut. It is thus that the exercise of the power is expressed in John xx. 23. The kingdom of heaven is here represented as a place with gates and bars, even as hell is pictured forth as a place fortified with gates and bulwarks, and to Peter is promised the keys to open and shut the gates—that is to say, to give access into the kingdom, or to exclude from it, with the assurance that his actings in the execution of this office will be ratified and confirmed in heaven itself, and by the great Judge of all.

That this power, however, is not absolute and irresponsible is rendered evident by the fact that Jesus personally is represented as the ultimate and sole possessor of it. It is he who is represented, on the one hand, as bearing the keys of hell and of death; and, on the other hand, the key of the house of David. The former keys he possesses in virtue of his atoning death and triumphant resurrection. He successfully assailed the stronghold of Satan—broke the barriers of the grave, and ascended as a conqueror, having spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly. And as he is alive for evermore, in virtue of his atoning death, he has those keys by which he effects for others the same deliverance as he achieved for himself. To him only it pertains to bring forth into glorious liberty the captives of Satan and sin, to spoil the grave of its prey, and to make his people partakers of his own glorious victory. To him pertains for ever the use of these keys, not only for the deliverance of his own people, but for the purposes of judgment and final retribution. At his word the sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and death and



hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them, and they shall be judged every man according to his works.

To him also belongs the key of David: he openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth. He gives access to the domain and heritage of the saints, and he excludes from participation in the promises. He exercises the royal prerogative which David held over Israel, and as now seated on his throne, admits to and excludes from the kingdom—secures an entrance to those whom he hath redeemed, and shuts out those who have falsely professed his name. It was the apostle John who thus, in vision, saw the risen Saviour in the possession and exercise of this power—exercising it while the apostles were still discharging their functions upon the earth. He is not represented as sharing it with them, far less as surrendering it unto them.

Whatever may be implied, then, in this power of the keys, certainly it does not imply the usurpation of the Saviour's own prerogative, the doing of that which he alone does, and is competent to do—the exercising of a prerogative which pertains to him expressly, because he was dead and is alive, having by his death purchased his own life and that of all the redeemed, who were included in him.

But there is a sense in which is made good to Peter and to the church the promise which Jesus here gives. They also bear the keys which Jesus put into their hands. They bind and loose—they open and shut, and what they do in this way is ratified in heaven. The nature of the power itself, and the influence of its exercise, may be best understood by considering the whole circumstances connected with the bestowal of it. Let it be borne in mind, then, that the address of Jesus to Peter on this occasion—the declaration of his blessedness—the bestowal of a new name upon him—the assignation of his place in the church, and this promise

of the keys, are all grounded on the proclamation of the faith which he had made—"Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." To him, as thus taught of the Father, and declaring the Father's counsel, is this promise made—not to old Simon, but to new Peter. This present confession which, as taught of God, he uttered, was echoed in heaven. It was the expression, by a heaven-taught disciple, of what the Lord had revealed to him. He but repeated what the Lord had engraven upon his mind. And his sentence so uttered is eternally and absolutely true. To Peter belongs the eminence of having first uttered this confession, but no other peculiarity.

We have already shown that everything which Jesus, in virtue of this confession, declares to Peter, pertains to every disciple who is able in truth to give utterance to the same confession. Peter's blessing is also his, and the new name, and the character of a living stone, and invincibility by the gates of hell. All these are the heritage of every true believer. And chiefly and most obviously this power of the keys is so. It essentially, and in the largest sense, is the power of proclaiming the divine counsel and determination, and a power therefore pertaining to every one who has been taught of the Father, and received the revelation of his will. It is not that God binds himself to act out and confirm the declarations and sentences of men, for this would be blasphemously to make him the servant of man, but that he teaches men what his will is, and enables them faithfully to declare it. The power doubtless belonged in a peculiar sense to those who were inspired, for to them it belonged, in virtue of their inspiration, to make new revelations of the divine will. But still it was God's counsel and judgment they were declaring, and not their own determinations and judgments. Even as inspired men, and as revealing to the church the will of God,

we find them ever appealing, as Jesus himself did, to the record which God had already given to the church, and demanding a reception for their testimony on the footing of its entire harmony with what they had already received and owned as divine.

It is so still. To the true disciple of Jesus is given light to know divine truth, and therefore the power to declare it, and what, as thus taught, he declares, is ratified and sealed in heaven, because it is really the determination and counsel of God. It is simply in this capacity and within this limit that the power exists. God is not the servant, but the Lord of men. It is the divine judgments that are effectual and everlasting, not those which are human. The truth which God has taught his people is the truth which endureth and is established. Nothing is bound or loosed in heaven which God's word does not bind or loose. Here men are not inventors or legislators, any more than Peter was. He simply declared what God had taught him, and so do they—nothing beyond this, nothing contrary to it.

Nor does it follow that, in the case of those who are divinely taught, all their words and declarations are to be received as emanating from a heavenly origin, and, therefore, as having divine power and efficacy. Had it been so the Christian church would never have had an existence. Let us look to the case of Peter himself. He has spoken what God had taught him, and in so doing is blessed—is a living stone—is invincible—receives the power of the keys. But immediately thereafter we find old Simon again acting and speaking—protesting against the atonement of Christ, and thus overthrowing the very foundation of all Christian verity and hope. Had such a judgment possessed divine validity, there had been no church and no salvation.

And as in the case of Peter so it is always. The disciple of Jesus does not always act and speak in harmony with his position and character. To him belongs a kind of duality of existence. There is in him the old man and the new—a spirit divinely enlightened to know the truth and to declare it, but a body also of sin and death—the one leading downwards to darkness and death—the other upwards to everlasting light and life. In him there is the same contrariety as obtains in the outward field of observation between the church and the world—the one following and declaring the truth, the other maintaining evil and falsehood. It belongs to no man, and to no body of men, always to speak the divine counsel, for none are in this world sinless. The divine judgments, therefore, rest not on the testimony of men, but on the changeless record which God has given of his will. To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word there is no life in them. Their decrees, without the divine sanction, have no validity, and must be disregarded and despised.

The power here bestowed is a power of stewardship, and not of lordship. Even Jesus himself was on the earth as the servant of his Father and the revealer of his will. He claimed and exercised no higher power than this. He was here as a steward—one set over the household, indeed, but simply to execute his Father's purpose in it. It was in this view that the ancient prophets had described his power and prerogative. Isaiah xxii. 20—22: "It shall come to pass in that day that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his

shoulder ; he shall open, and none shall shut ; and shall shut, and none shall open." It is obviously Jesus who is here predicted under the name of Eliakim, and that because he was to discharge Eliakim's functions. What these were appears from 2 Kings xviii. 17, 18, where he is said to have been over the household of king Hezekiah, not occupying a place of independent authority, but executing in the household the will and purposes of the king. So it is also that Jesus describes the place and functions of the ministers of his truth. Luke xii. 42 ; " Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household to give them their portion of meat in due season ?"

We have said that the power of binding and loosing is a power inherent in all true disciples, to whom God has revealed his will. But, in a special manner, it is evident from the Scriptures this power is committed to office-bearers of the church. They are described as overseers—rulers in the household of God (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2), as stewards of his mysteries (1 Peter iv. 10), as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. " A bishop must be blameless," says Paul (Titus i. 7), " as the steward of God." To them and in this capacity as stewards belongs, in a special manner, this function of binding and loosing.

The performance of this function implies the possession of two keys, which have been properly called respectively the key of doctrine and the key of discipline. By the key of doctrine they unlock the treasures of divine wisdom—unfold and declare the whole counsel of God—proclaim to men the way of pardon and acceptance, and the terrors of that law whose sentence is death—repeat and inculcate that testimony which God has given concerning his Son—give utterance to the blessings and curses which God himself has



pronounced. By the word of this divine testimony, they unloose the chains which have bound the captives of sin, and bring welcome deliverance and peace to the troubled soul, seal upon it the pardon which the Saviour purchased, and give access into that grace wherein believers stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. By that word they bind over the impenitent and unbelieving to condemnation. It is the savour of death unto death as well as of life unto life. They denounce the just judgments of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and seal on their souls the sentence which will be repeated on the great day of judgment. But in the use of this key they are expressly stewards. They cannot shut what God has opened, nor open what he has shut. They cannot alter or modify what he has determined. They merely proclaim what his determinations are.

Nor is this key exclusively theirs, though it be so in a peculiar and emphatic sense, because they have been specially set apart to labour in word and doctrine. But essentially this key is in the hands of all true disciples of Jesus. To those who know the truth belongs the power and the right to utter it as they have opportunity, and in doing so they are using the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever by that word they bind on earth is bound in heaven, and what they loose on earth is loosed in heaven. This power so conferred on the disciples of Jesus is far from being nugatory or trifling; it is all the more formidable that it is not an independent and irresponsible power, but the utterance of the determinations of God. By that word so spoken, the Lord is proving men, saving, or slaying them, delivering lost souls, and sealing others to condemnation. By that word, Jesus still sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. Even now in hearing that word, we, as it were, are cited to the

judgment seat, and the eternal destinies of men are, day by day, being determined—a rejected gospel sealing their destruction, a gospel believed and accepted, delivering the souls of the needy and those who have no helper.

To the disciples also, and especially and emphatically to the office-bearers or rulers in the church, is given the key of discipline. Not to them exclusively indeed, for it belongs to every true believer to recognise and hold fellowship with his co-disciples, and to exclude others from his fellowship. It is a function which all Christian men habitually and necessarily exercise, in determining their own society, and the amount and kind of intercourse they should hold with others. They are not bound to recognise as Christians all who are admitted into the fellowship of their church, nor to exclude from their fellowship those who are beyond its pale. They must judge for themselves in the light of God's truth, and admit or exclude accordingly. And this essentially is just the function which church rulers exercise, though modified according to the peculiar position they occupy. To them it belongs to admit to the fellowship of the church and to exclude from it, in either case following the directions of the divine word. It is that word which really binds or looses. To shut out men from church fellowship without its sanction is not to exclude from the kingdom of heaven,—to admit them without its warrant does not give entrance into the kingdom. But within these limits, and simply as dispensing the determinations and judgments of God, what they bind is bound, and what they loose is loosed.

This stewardship is obviously a sacred and responsible trust, which they cannot betray nor give into the hands of another. Nor is it a vain power. True, they may, and doubtless have erred, and such erroneous decrees are naught.

But at the same time, they are appointed of God to declare his counsel, and their decree stands sure, in so far as it is God's counsel.

Nor can the exercise of this power ever degenerate into tyranny, for those who use it are not in any sense legislators. The authority which they possess and exercise is simply the authority of the divine record which is in their hands, and which they bring to bear upon the understanding and the conscience. They are in the position of ambassadors, and not of potentates. They usurp an office which Christ never conferred upon them, when they are unable to show the sovereign's authority and instructions for what they do and say. The law which they administer and apply is a law accessible to all, and intelligible by all with whom they have to do. It is a law which governs both the ruled and their rulers, and in the submission of both parties to its requirements consists in great measure the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CROSS AND ITS BEARERS.

Matt. xvi. 20—27. Mark. viii. 30—38. Luke ix. 21—26.

Jesus now informs his disciples that the knowledge which they had divinely acquired, and in the possession of which they were so blessed, was a knowledge not immediately to be put to use. They understood correctly enough that they were to be confessors—that what the Father had revealed to them concerning Christ was to be by them proclaimed, and to constitute a blessedness for the world as it was to themselves. But the time for this had not yet come. It was not for them as now situated to commence this gracious evangelistic work to which they were destined. They were not yet fitted for it, and to the Jews it would have been but a new stumbling-block in the way of their reception of the Saviour. His work was to be finished before the revelation of the full glory of his person. For his work was to be one, as he immediately announces, of humiliation and suffering; and, had the Jews believed in him as the Son of God, his humiliation could not have been effected through their instrumentality, as it was predestined to be, and for the disciples to preach that truth now would have been merely to accumulate fresh guilt on the head of the Jews. In mercy to them, therefore, this knowledge is for a season withheld, even till, when by his victory over death, he had been declared to be the Son of God with power. It was then, for the first time, that this knowledge had a basis of fact on which to rest, and not till then, therefore, was the doctrine pub-

lished. For it is a peculiar characteristic of Bible truth that it everywhere makes its appeal to facts. All its doctrines rest on these, and till the fact has been accomplished the doctrine embodied in it is not fully declared.

But the disciples were evidently as unripe as the Jews, the one for proclaiming, the other for receiving this truth, until it should have been fully manifested to both in the facts of Christ's future history. At the best the disciples possessed a knowledge of but a half truth. By divine teaching they had discerned and confessed the divine in the human. They knew God in the person of Jesus Christ. But they were as yet ignorant of that truth which makes this knowledge so significant to man. They did not yet understand the doctrine of the atonement, as based on the meritorious sufferings and obedience of Jesus, and they could not now have preached as afterwards Peter did on the day of Pentecost, when, with such unction and power, he exhibited both the facts in their mutual bearings on each other—the glory and power of Christ's divinity—and the efficacy of his sufferings to rob death and Satan of their prey. Therefore, they are now commanded to be silent, to retain for a season in their hearts this great truth to the knowledge of which they had attained.

Nor is this charge of silence without its significance to us also, for it is good we should know, that in reference both to ourselves and to others, it is sometimes better to hold our peace than to speak. It is better when our knowledge is not ripe and full, and when to proclaim the truth would evidently be to injure its power and influence. Before the disciples became preachers, they became learners, and continued to be such until they apprehended the whole truth which they were commissioned to proclaim. It must be so always. The teacher must himself have learned, and it



is true wisdom for him to be silent until he knows what he speaks, and can render a reason for the hope that is in him.

### § I. THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR.

Jesus had already foreshadowed to his disciples the new relation they were destined to occupy, and had drawn forth a confession from them, by which they were already constituted into a distinct society. In this the foundation of a new church was laid, and already within that society they had become apostles as well as disciples. But they did not cease to be disciples. On the contrary, they had but learned their first lesson in divine truth. They had other and harder doctrines yet to master. They had taken, indeed, a most important step in advance. Jesus proceeds to lead them onwards.

They had attained to a knowledge of his divinity, and he now introduces them to a closer acquaintance with his work as a redeemer. The information he now communicates, however unacceptable, and at first incredible, is evidently closely related to that which they had already apprehended. Under the lowly guise of the carpenter's son of Nazareth, they had been able to see the incarnate divinity. But wherefore was he in this guise? why incarnate? why so lowly? If God was indeed to visit and to dwell with man on the earth, as the Jews devoutly believed, why now had He come in a form so extremely different from what they had ever known in their past history? To their fathers he had been revealed in the glory which radiated from the mercy seat, or in forms of manifestation equally glorious and terrible. Now, he appears without form or comeliness

that men should desire him. If now he is in far closer association with humanity than ever he had been revealed to be before, yet it is in such a condition as their reason could never have anticipated. If now he comes to the earth in a human form, it surely would have been more befitting his dignity, and more likely to obtain the belief and acceptance of men, if he had come in kingly guise, and in the exercise of royal power. Why should his face be thus marred? Why this march of the divine person through the very lowest vale of humiliation? Why was he not born in a palace, and living in regal state, instead of having nowhere to lay his head?

Such questionings as these must needs have soon arisen in the minds of the disciples, and it is, as it were, to meet and answer these that Jesus now unveils the course which was before him. That course is not to be one of triumph, but ever into deeper humiliation. He must go to Jerusalem, but it is not to be crowned, but to suffer; not to take possession of his kingdom, but to be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes; not to lead his people on to victory, but to perish by a shameful and cruel death.

Thus, to the astonishment and dismay of his disciples, Jesus speaks of the future. He has first revealed to them his divinity and now he reveals his sufferings. It is when their minds have laid hold on the one truth that he unfolds the other. This was timeously and wisely done. It was from the point of view which they had now reached that they were alone capable of apprehending the truth, into the knowledge of which he is now leading them. It might, indeed, have appeared easier and more natural to have reversed this order—to have first unfolded to them the doctrine of his humiliation, and then that of his divinity. His humiliation appeared to be the truth nearest to them, and

that which was the most easily apprehensible. But it was not really so. In order to understand his humiliation in that sense in which it is alone of any value and importance to man, we shall find that we must apprehend and receive the truth regarding his divinity. The historical facts, indeed, relating to his humiliation are all plain enough, and easily to be understood, apart from the knowledge of his divinity, such as, his lowly birth—the beneficent acts which characterised his humble and devoted life—the contradiction which he endured at the hands of proud and self-sufficient men—his purity, and meekness, and holy simplicity—the sublime moral lessons which he inculcated, and the termination of such a life in a cruel and disgraceful punishment. And, apart from the knowledge of his divine nature, it is conceivable that many noble and salutary lessons might have been gleaned by men from his mere human history, as doubtless men have learned such lessons from the life and teachings of Socrates. Even as a man, it must in candour be admitted that there are more sublime truths developed in the life of Jesus, than Socrates or Plato ever taught. He is emphatically, and far before all others, the model—the representative man—the pure and perfect one, “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners.” There is in him an unparalleled simplicity, integrity, and piety—such self-abandonment for the good of others—such steadfastness of purpose—such harmony and beauty in his holy life, and such glorious majesty in his death, as we look for in vain in the history of any other man. He stood alone against all the world, unshrinking and unabashed—a true moral hero—the comforter of others even when himself seemed most to need it—yet acting and suffering always with such meek simplicity, such utter want of anything like dramatic exhibition. Bowing submissively to the will of his Father, he

conquered death itself in the act of yielding to its power. In his life and death he is revealed as "fairer than the sons of men," and is, even as a man, teaching to all generations lessons of patience and fortitude—of meekness and love—of purity and self-denial, and absolute resignation to the will of God.

But in all this there is nothing of what these disciples and we need most to know. To apprehend him merely thus would still leave unsolved the grand question. Jesus would thus be presented to us, indeed, as the highest and the best of all teachers, and the most glorious martyr that ever died in the cause of truth. But what then? Would the knowledge of his suffering humanity have thrown any light at all on the great question affecting the relation in which we stand now to the just and holy God, or are to occupy hereafter in that state into which death has ushered him, and will soon carry us? The facts relating to the mere humanity of Jesus, reveal only more profoundly than before, the estrangement of the carnal mind from God; and its bitter enmity against him. In the hostility manifested against this god-like man, that enmity reached its climax. How was this enmity to be removed? How was the violated law to be satisfied? How were the judgments of conscience itself to be vindicated, and the claims of justice asserted? How were the judge and the criminal to be at one, and to agree in the same sentence? How was the transgressor to be delivered from punishment? How were God and man to be harmonized and reconciled in a holy and everlasting fellowship?

On such questions as these the humiliation and sufferings—the holy and devoted life of Jesus, considered in themselves, throw no light whatever. The whole mystery becomes luminous only in the manifestation of His divine

nature. When you have apprehended the Christ the Son of the living God, and know him as the person rendering this perfect obedience to the law, and enduring all this shame and agony, you have the key for the solution of all these hard questions. He, the eternal and only begotten of the Father, assumes our nature—becomes God manifest in the flesh—associates with his divine nature a perfect manhood. God thus dwells in man, and he in God. He takes upon him the form of a servant, and is made under the law—to magnify and make it honourable by his holy obedience, to suffer and die under its sentence, as a transgressor, bearing the sins of many—the one perfect and all sufficient sacrifice. He comes thus as the sinner's surety and representative—he lives as such, and dies in the same character, and he rises again and reigns, on their behalf and as their substitute. Salvation, therefore—salvation from guilt and from sin—is, in him, altogether free. Owing nothing personally to that law to which he became subject, he paid the debt of others, and paid it fully. But such an atonement is only possible to a divine person. None but such a one could either suffer adequately or obey for others.

He followed, therefore, the natural order in first revealing to his disciples the doctrine of his divinity. It was by their apprehension of this doctrine that they could alone rightly understand the mystery of his humanity, and the sufferings and ignominious death in which his life was to terminate. Without the knowledge of his divinity, these sufferings must not only have been to them inscrutably mysterious, but must have been utterly misunderstood, and so have failed in the grand object for which they were endured.

And this is the order of the divine teaching always. I know nothing of Jesus as I ought to know, till I have apprehended him as the Son of the living God. The facts of



his history, as the facts in the history of any distinguished man, may, indeed, convey some human, possibly some highly useful lessons, to me, apart from the higher knowledge of him which the Father reveals. But whenever the more profound questions are raised, relating to God, and the judgment, and the eternal state, I must have recourse to the knowledge of his divinity in order to solve them. I must begin with this, and in its glorious light read the great lesson of his obedience and sufferings.

But then this mode of teaching which we have seen to be so essential, did doubtless raise a new difficulty in the way of the disciples—a difficulty far greater than that which is now experienced by those who are learning the truth regarding his person and work. We shall easily comprehend how great that difficulty must have been, if we attentively consider the present state of their knowledge and feeling as men apprehending the Divine nature in the person of Christ, and what a contrast their acquaintance with his real dignity and majesty afforded to what he tells them regarding his future life and destiny on the earth. It was conceivable that a man, however worthy, however morally great, might be despised, and rejected, and killed, by an ignorant and debased multitude, whose interest it was to live in darkness and corruption. But the Son of the living God!—how should such a destiny await him? It is doubtless the most sublime of all contrasts, and yet it must have been the most perplexing.

It was hard for them to understand and to reconcile what they knew him to be with what he declared was to happen to him. He was revealed to them as at once the highest and the vilest; the most righteous and yet the most sinful; the most powerful, and yet the weakest; the richest, and yet the poorest; infinitely beyond the reach of suffering, and yet the greatest sufferer; the world's maker and ruler, and

yet a man without a home or resting-place in it. This union of the divine and human in Christ, and, above all, the fact of his suretyship, justly entitles him to the name Wonderful ! His life and nature constitute the great mystery of Godliness.

Yet all these contrasts have their blessed and glorious harmony, in the believing perception and apprehension of which we recognise the sufferer as the Saviour, the victim of death and yet its conqueror, and, above all, in which we discern the principle and the only one according to which God and man are reconciled and united. This union is effected in him who was the Son of man and the Son of God, who exhausted the law's curse, and magnified it by his righteousness.

The disciples did not yet understand this, and when Jesus spoke of his sufferings, he seemed to them as one that dreamed. And to add still farther to the incredibility of what he now speaks, he tells them of the hands which were to inflict on him these terrible indignities. He does not speak of the manner of his death, farther than to intimate that it was to be a violent one, and after great sufferings ; but he brings prominently forward the persons who were to deal the blow. These were the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, the representatives and heads of the Jewish people. The elders were the rulers and magistrates of the Jewish commonwealth, in so far as the Romans had left to them any right of self-government. They had not indeed the power of life and death, and an appeal lay against their judgment to the authority of Cæsar. But still they were judges in the first instance, and conducted the ordinary civil administration of the kingdom. These were to be against him, and agents in inflicting his sufferings. Then, second, the priests, who were the heads of the ec-

clesiastical government, men who stood as mediators between the people and God, who were daily in the temple, through whom all acceptable sacrifice was presented, and who alone had access to the holy place, and to the altar of incense where prayer was always made, and where the light of the holy oil always burned—these were also to be against him. And, lastly, there were the scribes, men in whom was centred all the learning of the community, the expounders of the Scriptures, and the oracles of the people, to whom reference was made in all questions of difficulty, the occupiers of the seat of Moses. From these also he was to suffer many things.

This must have been to them a terrible announcement—extinguishing at once all their temporal and religious hopes. Opposed alike by the powers of this world and of the world to come—having against them the religion, the learning, and the power of their nation, what hope could there be for them? They were already aware, indeed, that these classes looked with a scowling eye on Jesus, and present appearances indicated such an issue as he here points at. But they still clung to the belief that such a state of things was temporary. It is true that there was very much in the present condition of Jesus fitted to bring about such a result. But being sure that he was the Christ, the Son of God, they felt confident that the time of his obscurity must be brief, that his glory would soon be revealed, and that, amid the hosannas and rejoicings of the whole nation, he would restore the kingdom to Israel. But if what Jesus now spoke was true, in what a position did its fulfilment place them? The events which he now foretells involved the hostility of the whole of the Jewish nation; for these parties—the elders, the priests, and the scribes—authoritatively spoke its mind. They then, in cleaving to Jesus, must become aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,

and, as appeared, strangers also to the covenants of promise. The Jews, they knew, indeed, in entering upon such a conflict, must needs be ultimately the weaker party, and must ensure their own rejection and destruction—for was not Jesus the Son of God? To raise an arm against him, therefore, was to ensure its being paralysed. But then, was not Jesus the Messiah, the deliverer of that very people, the hope of Israel, and their saviour in the time of trouble? How could both of these things be true? How could Jesus at once destroy and save them? It was a difficulty too great for them. Not till long afterwards were they able to understand the profounder meaning of these Scripture predictions and promises, and to lay hold on the truth, that the real seed of Abraham were the children of his faith—that the Abrahamic covenant was a covenant with the uncircumcised, in order that he might be the father of all them that believe, whether Jew or Gentile, and that the Israel of God were his children, not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. But meanwhile all was dark and perplexing, contrary to all the fond thoughts and hopes which had possessed their minds. To apprehend the truth aright implied a crucifixion of their inner nature, as real and death-dealing as that which the body could undergo. It was the passing away of all old things, and the establishment of the new—the formation of a church and kingdom distinct and separate from the corrupt Jewish church and commonwealth. To receive the Christ was to them literally to abandon everything else—to abandon certainly their home and country: and now also, what was more terrible, it appeared that they must abandon their hereditary faith and venerable traditions, their very thoughts, and hopes, and affections. The trial was for the moment too severe for them. They staggered under the burden which Jesus imposed. There

was truly need at this moment for all the faith they had in him as the Son of God. To trust in a suffering Saviour, it was necessary for them to know him in his glory as the Christ.

Looking to the circumstantial and specific character of this prediction of Jesus, some have been bold enough to affirm that it was not uttered by him at all in the form in which we now have it. They admit, indeed, that he foresaw and spoke of his sufferings in a general way, but allege that the Evangelists, in framing their narrative after the fact, had confounded their recollections of the past with the subsequent events, and had thus given a minuteness to their history which did not characterize the actual prediction. It is needless to deal with a conjecture so utterly gratuitous as this, farther than to say, that in speaking of his future sufferings to the disciples, Jesus is here much less minute than the authors of the Psalms, and the prophets, who centuries before had spoken of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which was to follow. Here, indeed, we have no indistinct reference to the very language of ancient prophecy. This rejection of Christ by the heads and representatives of the Jewish commonwealth had been foretold in Ps. cxviii. And on this rejection of him by the builders was based the realization of all believing hope. "Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go in to them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." The world's jubilee, and the opening of the gates of righteousness, depended on the fact



of the rejection of that stone, which was to become the head-stone of the corner ; and that stone was to be refused by the builders. The language of this Psalm is in marvellous harmony with that figure of speech which Jesus had just been employing in setting forth the establishment of his kingdom on the earth. The one was fitted to suggest the other. He had been speaking of building his church. He had been in fact laying its foundations. He had been selecting stones to place in the base of the structure. The Psalm, indeed, had spoken of other builders than he—and greatly less wise, builders who would seek to erect a fabric not according to the counsel of God, but against it, who would refuse the stone, which, according to the divine purpose, was to constitute the head-stone of the corner. But in spite of their folly and wickedness this purpose of God should stand ; yea, through the instrumentality of their folly and malice, that purpose would be accomplished, and thus the gate of righteousness would be opened whereby men might enter in and praise the Lord. These builders of the church were not infallible—these elders and priests and scribes might all be mistaken, and so thoroughly mistaken, as to undermine the structure they sought to raise, and insure its overthrow by refusing the chief corner-stone. They could thus build nothing substantial and permanent. They were indeed busy enough—full of unprecedented zeal—compassing sea and land to make one proselyte—adding stone after stone to that building, which with such anxious haste they were rearing, and which was destined so soon to be overthrown. It was a tower of Babel and not a temple—a monument of human pride, ambition, and self-righteousness—not a habitation for the God of Israel. In their refusal of that stone, the builders had become openly and specifically anti-Christian.

But neither Peter nor the rest of the disciples yet understood fully the meaning of the new name they had received, for all this was implied in it. Here was the wise master builder—there the foolish men rearing a house on the sand. Here was the foundation of a glorious temple laid—there a house threatened with impending ruin. Here was a Church of which the elders and priests and scribes were not heads, nor even members—there an established order and form of a Church tottering to destruction.

This fact embodies a lesson for all time. These men, as was indeed natural, had bound up the eternal in the temporary—they were unable to separate from local circumstances and associations those everlasting verities which the Scriptures have revealed. They knew and believed that the Church would be everlasting—that Israel was imperishable—that the iron tooth of time could make no impression on the temple of God—that with the lapse of years there would come to the Church an ever increasing magnitude and glory—that her sun would not go down nor her moon withdraw herself, because the Lord was her everlasting light. But then, in their view, this permanence was associated with the structure of Jewish society and the Jewish commonwealth, with the locality of Mount Zion, the strength and beauty of Jerusalem, and the seed of Abraham according to the flesh.

How natural and easily embraced such thoughts are, appears from the whole history of Popery. Rome has become the modern Jerusalem, and not the less but the more certainly Antichrist. She, too, has acted over again the part of the elders and priests and scribes—has bound up the eternal in the temporary, limited the Holy One of Israel, and substituted an external form of worship for that which is in spirit and in truth,—localised that which has no locality,—and circumscribed within the bounds of a society that which

is all embracing—and she believes in the infallibility and permanence of this outward structure. It is not so, and cannot be so. Simply because each man is fallible, whole communities are also fallible. The rejection of Jesus by the elders, priests, and scribes, furnishes an everlasting testimony to the fallibility of every church. The great thing for the man for us is not an external association, but to build on this corner-stone. I may be in the true church, while I am not truly of it. Religion is the business of every man, and not merely of the church collectively. To me, as to these builders on Mount Zion, is always put the alternative whether I will refuse that stone. I am in and of the church when I make that the chief stone of the corner, and not otherwise. If Christ is not mine personally, no locality, or name or association, will serve me instead. Let me make sure of this—that in building I build on Christ and with him, and that I am a stone in that enduring edifice against which the storms of earth and hell beat in vain.

Observe yet again the manner in which Jesus speaks of the many sufferings awaiting him. He does not mention them as a futurity merely, but as a necessity. “He *must* suffer many things.” It is not at all a matter of contingency, a thing which might be avoided by some change in the course of events. It is needless to desire or hope for a different issue. This *must* be. Jesus speaks in a way thus determinate of his sufferings, as it were, to anticipate the objections which he knew were in the minds of his disciples, and to reconcile them to his sufferings as an inevitable necessity. He *must* suffer. The Word of God had declared it. The daily and yearly sacrifices uttered the same language to the ear of faith. It was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that he was to suffer. Without this there is no possible salvation. There

must be bloodshedding in order to remission, death in order to deliverance from its power. His was not the death of a faithful witness who might escape the doom of martyrdom by flight or by the mercy of his persecutors. He was the lamb of God, a destined victim bound to the horns of the altar. This sacrifice must be. The eternal love of God for fallen men had so determined it. It must be. All nature proclaimed its necessity—this revolted earth throughout all its domain—the creation which till now had been groaning and travailing in pain—man, and the sphere of his habitation, accursed by reason of his sin. Who shall assume that curse and remove it? It is thus alone that it can be removed. Causeless it did not come, without sufficient cause it cannot depart. Who shall take upon him that burden under which creation groans—and accumulate upon his own head—that manifold weight of woe and sorrow! Who is able to bear it! Who is able to open the sealed book of promise, and scatter its precious contents over the wide earth, and make them good to men! Who but he the Christ, the Son of the living God. He alone is worthy—he alone has the power. He must suffer and die, else all men must die for evermore.

Yet while Jesus speaks thus certainly of his sufferings, they are as a dark cloud projected from a field of light, which gives sure promise of clear shining after the rain. Without the cloud there cannot be the bow. The revelation of judgment is, in his history, also the revelation of covenant mercy. He must be killed, but then he must also rise again—not overcome of death, but overcoming it. He goes to the grave, but it is to rob it of its prey; and thus, indeed, by his resurrection from the dead, to be revealed as the Son of God, with power,—the Son of the living God, himself the centre and source of all true and enduring life.

Let us look out then on this mysterious scene. **Jesus**

indicates not only its darkness, but its light, and says as it were in the language of the poet—

“See truth, love, and mercy, in triumph descending,  
And nature all glowing in Eden’s first bloom ;  
On the cold cheek of death smiles and roses are blending,  
And beauty immortal awakes from the tomb.”

In him was to be fulfilled all that prophets and holy men of old had spoken, all that the fathers had seen afar off and hoped for, and hence the speciality by which this declaration is characterized. The spirit of prophecy is himself here, and must fulfil the prophetic word. Hence also there is a *must be* for these sufferings, and that triumph. These predictions had been most minute—proclaiming his twofold nature, his descent and family—the time, place, manner, and circumstances of his birth—his offices and works—his betrayal and trial—the cruelty and scorn and mockings of his adversaries, in the very language which they would employ—the buffeting he was to endure, and the parting of his garments—his being nailed to the cross, and the piercing of his side with a spear. But the disciples had forgotten all this, or understood it differently. They can not think it literally possible, nor can they now hear the note of victory with which the announcement of his sufferings and death is accompanied. Their minds rest upon, and revolt against the one idea of his sufferings. They have no room to entertain the thought of his resurrection. Therefore they wander into mazes of error, and bring upon their heads a just and severe reproof.

It happens thus always with partial views of divine truth. Here emphatically it is the case that a half truth is a whole error. We must receive all or get the benefit of none. To minds partially receiving it, the Bible is a contradiction and



an incredibility, while to others it presents a glorious harmony. No jot or tittle of it can fall to the ground. Let us take heed that no jot of it fall out of our thoughts and conceptions. Let us receive it in its entirety into our hearts, and we shall perceive that everything in it that is painful has its antidote of pleasure—that everything in it that is mysterious has its phase of light—that everything in it that is weak has its secret of strength—that all the humility and suffering it reveals has its counterpart of eminent glory—that all sin has its cleansing fountain—all contrasts their harmonious unity—that on the face of every cloud there beams the radiance of the bow of the covenant. Let us hope and fear. Let us learn both our sinfulness and our place of safety, and from the *must be* of Christ's sufferings, let us ever more profoundly study both these lessons, and light shall arise upon our darkness; and from the foot of that Cross, which speaks so loudly of the divine justice and the malignity of sin, we shall lift up our eyes, and behold the King in his beauty, and the land that is afar off, and our disburdened souls shall be filled with the melody of praise. We shall enter in by the gate of righteousness, and rejoice that the stone which the builders refused has been made the head-stone of the corner.

## § II. THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS.

We have adverted to the singular contrasts which are presented in the person and life of Jesus. There are contrasts of a different and more painful kind in the history of his apostle. The alternations of strength and weakness—of humility and presumption—of cowardice and courage in the experience of Peter, render his life one of the most striking and remarkable to be found in the annals of

biography, while these very features which characterise it render it one of the most instructive. For, in a subordinate sense, there was exhibited in Peter too, as in his master, the divine and the human,—in the one case, indeed, there is a perfect humanity in union with a glorious divinity,—in the other a spiritual and heaven derived-nature, contending against a carnal nature, and these natures exhibiting mutually and alternately their strength—sometimes presenting to our observation the humble, heroic martyr, daring all and accomplishing all, by the power of the clear sighted and vigorous faith by which he overcomes the world, and then again the weakness, frailty, sin, passion, and prejudice of a nature at once selfish and ambitious, rash and cowardly.

But recently he has witnessed a good confession ; he now proves himself to be a presumptuous intermeddler. Once he walked boldly on the sea ; the next moment he sank in slavish terror. Once he was ready to die for his Master ; on the same evening, like a coward, he denied all knowledge of him. These alternations of character were as sudden as they were striking. He presents to us on the same day, and almost in the same moment, characteristics extremely the opposite of each other. It was the same man acting throughout and yet not the same. It was not the same nature acting in different circumstances, but a different nature acting in the same circumstances. He triumphed and was defeated in the same hour—braved danger, and was overborne by it—rose now to the height of divine knowledge, and now again sank into the depths of presumptuous ignorance. Now he was the humble suppliant, and again immediately he became the proud dictator. There was doubtless a disharmony in this nature of his. In him we do not see a man merely acting under the influence of different emotions or passions, but a man in whom there was a

warfare between the flesh and the Spirit—who in himself, as Simon, was the most impulsive and inconstant of men—as Peter, the unshrinking, self-sacrificing, apostle of the truth.

It is a thing altogether worthy of remark in his history, that a new privilege always exposes him to a new fall; on ascending one step he is hurled back always to a greater depth than that out of which he had issued. Throughout his history as a disciple we can trace this remarkable development. On the sea of Galilee he manifested this alternation of strength and weakness. On the present occasion, again, he has made a prodigious step in advance, and received the blessing of the Lord, and has had a distinguished place assigned him in the very foundation of the Christian church; but no sooner is he so elevated than at once he is precipitated, and from being a living stone in the sacred building, becomes a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. Again, on a future occasion he sat at the supper table, and his affections and reverence were so enkindled that he was ready to die a martyr's death; but on the same night he proved himself a cowardly apostate.

Nor is this remarkable history of his altogether peculiar. Nay, we shall find it a very common phase in the experience of the spiritual life, in which, with greater or less distinctness, we may always trace these alternate victories and defeats, these violent oscillations from the spiritual to the carnal, the re-action of the one nature upon the other. And in looking at such facts we must not forget that every advancing step in the spiritual life really exposes us to a new danger—that a new gift implies a new peril. There is in these alternations something natural as well as supernatural. It is natural that when there has been a great strain upon the emotions in one direction, there should be a re-action in another. Thus it is noticeable that the most

violent passions are the shortest lived. But such changes are also supernatural ; for the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience, and still seeks to resume his lost sway in the children of God, is constrained to put forth every effort to drag back and reclaim the bird which begins to soar, when it has escaped out of the hands of the fowler.

From this fact we learn a twofold lesson.

1st, That we are never in greater peril than in the enjoyment of the highest privilege—that the higher we rise the more exposed we are to the shafts of the archer—that if we are set on a hill for observation we become therefore also the objects of assault. It behoves us, then, to be always humble and watchful, and, more especially, if we have been receiving good at the hands of the Lord—if we have become more clear-sighted, more loving, more joyful, more bold and confident in the power of faith. These jewels of grace tempt the rapacious hand of the spoiler. Then, above all, we need to stand clothed in the whole armour of God.

2d, Let us learn here also the mystery of God's dealings with his people in the dispensation of His grace, and wherefore and how it often appears as if He were stinted and slow in the bestowal of his richest gifts. We know that there awaits believers what the apostle has called an exceeding\* weight of glory. This weight they could not now bear, the excess of that light would produce blindness. So now God gives according to their capacity to receive—does not overload them—but gives them sufficient grace. To do more would be to expose them to more signal defeats, to deeper disgrace.

Even now Peter has received very largely at the hand of Jesus. The Master has bestowed on him an unexampled honour. It is more than his poor frail nature can stand ; he staggers under the weight, and falls into a terrible abyss

of guilt, and shame, and misery. Let us observe his conduct, and the lessons it is fitted to convey—the actings of the old man in this most honoured disciple of the Christian faith.

1st, He takes Jesus aside from his fellow-disciples—for the word rendered *took* literally means this—he withdraws him for the purpose of private and confidential intercourse. He will not utter what he has to say in the presence of the rest—as if they were worthy to take part in the remonstrance and reproof which is upon his lips. Has he not been peculiarly honoured—has he not been set in a place of greater trust and responsibility than they? Is he not entitled, then, to confidences in which they have no right to share—to speak to Jesus in a way in which no other is entitled to address him, and to receive from him communications as to his *real* purpose, which it would be a kind of sacrilege to impart to others? Therefore, he takes Jesus aside, and whispers in his ear this presumptuous reproof. He begins already to lay on the walls of the Christian church that which the fire must consume. He has got proud of the position assigned to him, and vainly expects that the Lord will make some communication to him which will directly contradict the plain meaning of the words he had just spoken.

2d, He says, “be it far from thee, Lord,”—or as it is in the margin, “pity, or spare thyself.” Think better of what thou hast said, and change thy mind; thou confessedly art the Lord, the Son of the living God—it would be a practical contradiction of this glorious fact, that thou shouldst suffer, that thou shouldst die, that thou shouldst be rejected of the elders and priests and scribes. This prediction must be a word which thy present gloomy despondency has forced from thee, and not what really is to happen. A very different des-



tiny must await thee, Lord. If thou art the Son of God, save thyself. Though not uttered in the spirit of bitter mockery in which these words were spoken by the scoffing multitude around the cross, the language and meaning of Peter are almost the same. He, the honoured disciple, has already become an enemy, and utters the language of unbelief, and cannot retain his confidence in the divinity of Christ, if He is to be a sufferer.

3d, Getting bolder, as he proceeds with his rebuke, he adds—"this shall not be unto thee." I will not have it so. It must be otherwise. He quits the disciples' place, and assumes that of a director and judge. I will prevent this—thou shalt not submit to it—thou shalt be free of all pain and suffering and disgrace, which would be inconsistent with the dignity of thy nature, and a perpetual disproof that thou art the Christ.

After all, then, it is not without some reason and fundamental truthfulness that Romanists claim this man as the founder and patron of their church; but then that church takes its form and character not from Peter the confessor and apostle, but from old Simon again re-asserting his dominion, and yielding to the dictates of Satan. In the spirit and manner of this rebuke of Simon, we have the germ of Popery—the root out of which that vast system has developed itself. But then it is to be observed, that it is not Peter, the submissive and obedient disciple, who is its author, but carnal Simon instigated by one more carnal and subtle than he.

Observe how from such a source have sprung—

1st. The assumption of the Pope, as if he alone had the ear of the Lord, and was entitled to announce his will. He, like Simon, takes the Lord aside, as it were, for secret conference, and as if he alone had the privilege of access to

him and to proclaim with a voice of divine authority what he will have men to do. The assumption of this lordly authority over men, does not indeed crown his ambition, but is merely the outflowing of that greater presumption in virtue of which he claims to be the master of Christ himself.

2d. Like Simon, he also virtually says, spare thyself. This Christianity is not to be a religion of crucifixion, self-denial, humility, and worldly contempt. It shall be a religion of worldly influence and authority—of pomp and grandeur—of self-indulgence and pride—a religion which shall gratify human ambition, and set its foot on the necks of kings. His language always is, spare thyself—spare nothing but thyself, let everything be subservient to thy ease, and self-indulgence and grandeur.

Here, on the one side, then, in the language of Simon, we have Popery—here, on the other side, in the language of Jesus, we have Christianity. For the relations between the true religion and the world are unalterable. Simon says, spare thyself—Jesus says, I go to suffer and die. To follow Simon's advice is to leave the world unsaved. In the case of Jesus, emphatically and peculiarly it is so, and yet in a certain measure and degree it is the case in the history of every true disciple. Peter learned and spoke another language when he became truly an apostle of the Christian faith. He could not then spare himself, for, like Jesus, and in his spirit, he sought to spare the world. Pity to himself would have left the world in darkness. So it is now and always, he that would save others cannot save himself—he must give himself for the good of others—must be not a commander but a servant—not a man seeking his own ease and comfort, but surrendering them for the well-being of the perishing and the lost.

3d, Like Simon, the Pope assumes the attitude and lan-

guage of a director, and not of a disciple. It is not his to hear submissively what the Lord says, but to dictate to the Lord what he ought to do—not to learn what his will and purpose are, but to decree what they must be. Popery has been well and truly called, the religion of human nature acting under Satanic influence. We see in the example of Simon that it is really so. Its condemnation has been long ago pronounced in the ever emphatic words, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

Let us now attend to the reproof which Jesus gives to his erring disciple. It is a reproof not administered in secret conclave, but in the presence of, and as partly addressed to, all the disciples. It is said in Matthew that Jesus *turned*, and in the parallel passage in Mark yet more specifically, “when he had turned about, and looked on the disciples, he rebuked Peter.” His words are addressed to the disciple who had outwardly offended, but are spoken in the hearing of the rest, whom Jesus doubtless knew to be at heart participant in Peter’s sin. There was something in them all, of that which had come out of Peter, with such ready boldness.

The first words of the reproof are startling enough, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” Has this Peter, then, the foundation-stone of the spiritual temple, become already a Satan, an enemy, a seducer? Alas, then, for the stability of the Christian church. How shall that be built, which already, in the very laying of the foundation, manifests such insecurity. If the elders, and priests, and scribes, are building a house on the sand, because they are rejecting the head-stone of the corner, has Jesus here in Cæsarea Philippi been founding a more enduring edifice? That which he has done seems already to be overthrown. This foundation stone has become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

Alas, indeed, for the stability of the church if it depended on men, however eminent and excellent ! But the temple is spiritual and not human,—a building of God, not the work of man, and therefore it is indestructible. Therefore let no man glory in men. Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord.

What a contrast is presented here ! “Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” “Get thee behind me, Satan !” Thou hast become an adversary, and no longer a friend. Thou hast put thyself foremost—thou oughtest to be behind. Jesus here recognizes the true adversary as acting through Peter. We wrestle, says the apostle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickednesses in high places. Satan now sits in the highest place, commanding the emotions and faculties of this apostle, and is speaking and acting through him. Jesus afterwards told this very disciple that Satan had desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat. That desire is being at this moment fulfilled. He has sifted Peter, and proved what mere chaff and nothingness there is in him—and is making it manifest that whatever fitness he may have for being a foundation-stone in the temple, lies not in himself, but in what the wise master builder, by the inhabitation of his spirit, will yet make of him.

“Thou art an offence to me.” The use of this word “offence” in the gospels shews that this statement of Jesus is different from his merely denouncing Peter as an offender because of the words he had spoken. To offend, and to be an offence, is to be a ground or occasion of offence, a temptation. It is in this sense Jesus now speaks. Thou temptest me. As has been well observed, “It was in fact a severe and deep-searching temptation for Jesus, this word of the beloved Peter, springing from a zeal which at heart was so

well-meant," yet so miserably mistaken.<sup>1</sup> Hence he does not answer here with his usual winning tenderness, for he feels most keenly whatever has reference to the necessity of his suffering, and the possibility of escape from it. This cross—this drinking the cup of wrath—was his sorest temptation, far more searching and painful than his temptation in the wilderness, as we may see from comparing his acting in the garden and in the wilderness respectively. This baptism was what straitened him, what he looked forward to with awe and trembling. Yet it was what he had set himself to endure, what was to constitute the foundation of his whole gracious work. And now when he would seek to familiarize his own mind and theirs with that terrible fact, from which his tender nature yet shrunk in fear, when he would resist and overcome the biddings of his sensitive humanity to put the cup away from him, then comes this disciple to second these promptings of nature, and to press him to relinquish it. It was an artful and severe temptation. He nobly overcomes it now, as always, but the severity of his struggle sharpens his rebuke. Thou hast assumed Satan's office, and hast in thy turn become a tempter. Here he has the sore trial of being wounded in the house of his friends.

How often since, has this been realized, how often by our timid selfishness, how often in our experience! We also are often in ignorance. What injury have our folly and wilfulness wrought to the church! We too have experienced such treatment at the hand of others. Those whose intentions towards us may be the best, are often to us the most dangerous, and draw us farthest aside from the path of duty, above all when that path threatens to be one of self-denial and suffering.

<sup>1</sup> *Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus, in loco.*



Jesus reveals to Peter the source of his folly and presumption. "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Thou hast ceased to be spiritual and art again merely human. He says this partly in reproof, and partly in extenuation. He has patience with, and will not cast off this presumptuous sinning disciple. Thou speakest as a man, with what wisdom a man has, and with that feeling, too, which thy affectionate heart prompts. Thou hast not apprehended the true nature of this decree, under which I must suffer. Thou seest only the shame of it, and not its glory. Thou would not willingly make me disobedient, but in thine ignorance thou servest the enemy, and assumest Satan's side against me. Thou lovest me, even whilst thou art my tempter. The human in thee has become profane, because it cannot grasp the council of God in redemption, nor apprehend how, by death, death must be vanquished. For thee there must be fresh trials, and a far deeper humiliation, in order to apprehend it. In the crucifixion of these things of man, thou wilt one day apprehend it—how God's method is the opposite of man's, that he humbles in order to exalt, how of the last he makes the first, and out of the vilest the most noble ; how not only the Cross of Christ is the source of all nobility and glory, but how it is the pattern or type after which God works, and how thus out of things contemptible, and things that are not, it educes those divine qualities and powers which are the glory of the spiritual firmament. For he has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and the base things of the world and things that are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.

## § III. TAKING UP THE CROSS.

Jesus had been speaking of his own sufferings and death greatly to the surprise and displeasure of his disciples, for in this case, as in other instances, Peter is to be regarded as the mouthpiece and representative of them all. Not that all of them, indeed, would have expressed their objection precisely in the same way as he, but all of them entertained radically the same feeling regarding the incongruity of suffering and death with the glory and dignity of Christ the Son of the living God. They anticipated for him, and that in a visible and temporal sense, the fulfilment of the Baptist's prediction—"He must increase." They could not conceive that he should descend lower than to be such a man as he was. It appeared to them as if he had begun his earthly life at the lowest step,—that from henceforth there must be for him an ascent into a condition more in harmony with what they knew and had been divinely taught regarding his inherent majesty and power.

With such conceptions of the earthly history of the Messiah, there were necessarily associated, though perhaps not distinctly acknowledged even to themselves, certain expectations as to their own destiny. For they were peculiarly his followers ; they had cast in their lot with him, and must have anticipated for themselves some share in that advancement which they expected for him. When, therefore, they revolted at the idea of his sufferings and death, there might have been lying at the root of the affectionate interest they felt and expressed for his welfare, some grain of selfish ambition. To contemplate for him such misery and degradation, was to cast the shadow of it over their

own life also. They would indeed have been deeply offended had Jesus expressly told them so, and yet the course of his argument with them constrains us to believe that this was very much their state of mind. It would indeed be utterly untrue to say that their concern was altogether a selfish one—that they cared not for his dignity, and exaltation, and comfort—that they did not really feel the apparent incongruity between his real nature and his outward condition. But, mixed up with that reverential regard, there was a kind of unconscious selfishness—an unexpressed hope which they felt was now well nigh blighted.

Nor let us, in thus judging them, forget that the same feeling of self-regard is commingled with all the exercises of mere human affection. However tender and true love may be, the interest it feels in its object is never altogether separated from an under current of self-regard.

Jesus enters into, and exposes this feeling of theirs. After the severe reproof he has uttered, he at once proceeds on the assumption that his lot and theirs were to be to some extent identical. He speaks to that state of feeling into which they had passed. They, in looking forward to his rejection and death, have been contemplating also their own. He tells them that they are not deceived—that what awaited him awaited them also. If, therefore, they protested against his sufferings, even while their own were unacknowledged and unseen, he tells them plainly that his history and theirs were really so far identical—that, if they shrank from the fact of his death and ignominy, it was right they should see it in all its grave consequences to themselves. He puts to them now the alternative of following or of rejecting him. He will not hide from them what is to happen. He does not seek self-deceived followers—to make men his dupes—and therefore he indicates that if they are

to come after him, it must be as sufferers after a suffering Saviour. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for whosoever will save his life shall lose it," &c.

Now that they had recognised him as the Son of God, he presents to them fully the reverse of the picture. In their very recognition of that grand fact, and as implied in the full apprehension of its meaning, it was high time for them to get rid of all the carnal prejudices of their Jewish education, and of their human instincts, and to understand their mutual relation, and what was implied in it. To be a saviour he must suffer—to be disciples they must suffer. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. As they have seen through the veil of his humanity the glory of the Son of God, he will have them to look more deeply into the mystery of his incarnation. How were they to account for the marvellous fact of which they were now witnesses—that the only begotten of the Father should be in the condition in which they saw him—the son of man also, and in man's lowest state? What meant this wonderful union of majesty and of meanness—that he who was the highest should already have descended so low? Could they interpret that fact? Had it a meaning unless he should descend still lower? Did it mean that man—especially that a Jew—stood so high in favour with God, in such intimate and endearing relationship to him, that this was the appropriate expression of such intimacy and favour on the part of God? But, if so, would not the natural and rational course have been to elevate man yet higher, and not to humble the Son of God? Had it not been thus with Enoch, who walked with God—and with Elijah, who had ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire? Man's excellence, his nearness to God, could not evidently account for

the incarnation. There must be some other reason for the humiliation of the Son of God—for his manhood—for his servitude. What could it be? The right answer to this question would have solved to them the whole mystery. If it was not man's righteousness which led to it, it must have been man's guilt. No other alternative could present itself to their reason. And all along in the history of the Christian faith, we find, in point of fact, just this alternative in many forms substantially presenting itself. Either man is so loveable as to have invited and called forth this divine manifestation, in order to draw him into yet closer, more intimate, and affectionate union with God; or man is so guilty that he needs a sacrifice—a propitiation—a saviour. Here lies the marrow of the whole question between man and God.

These disciples are now set to the consideration of this great question. In asserting their own righteousness, it is manifest that they must reject the suffering Saviour, as already, indeed, by these rash words of Peter, they had done. But if they were not to do this, if they were to own their guilt, their bondage to sin, their corruption, their alienation from God, was it enough that Christ should be a man? From his present lowliness must he not descend still lower? Did not the sin of which they were guilty imply the suffering of death? Had not God from the beginning declared, "The soul that sinneth shall die?" Had not the ceremonial law, by its manifold sacrifices, been proclaiming, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission?" Was it not evident that the blood of bulls and goats could not purge the conscience of man—that there must be a better and holier sacrifice? Was this, then, the appointed sacrifice? Had Jesus not been pointed out to them at first as the Lamb of God to take away sin? In the spirit of self-



righteousness, they thought, indeed, that they had seen something of the favourable regard of God to them, and they ventured to believe that this mission of his Son might be a farther indication and expression of it. But now, if they looked at the fact from the opposite point of view, how unspeakably was the love of God magnified ! If the Son of God was to suffer and die, it must be as made a curse for man—to bear their sins in his own body. Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that He first loved us and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. In God's sight they were altogether vile and abominable, because of the sin which had infected their whole nature. He says, deliver from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom. This Christ who has already become a man, and in manhood's poorest state, has not ended the course of his humiliation. He, the pure and glorious Son of the Father, is here as man's surety and substitute, to take upon himself the burden of his people's sins, and to endure the punishment which they had deserved. He must, therefore, descend still lower, must be a victim, a sacrifice, and by his own blood purge their consciences from dead works.

To such truths Jesus is now directing the attention of his disciples. They did not fully understand him now. They did afterwards when he had ascended. This terrible contrast between humiliation and glory must be realised in him, and for them also there must be a cross. Their mutual sufferings, how far different they were, and yet the same. His cross and theirs are, in one view, contrasted, for his cross is their salvation. He is a vicarious sufferer and sinner, one assuming their burden and delivering them. His death is their life. In his exhausting the penalty of the law, and yet righteously fulfilling it, lie their eternal peace and safety. And yet for them there was a cross

also. The saving of them not only implied his death, but theirs also. If they had such a vile nature, a mind and heart so depraved and given over to sin,—if they were so estranged from God, and such transgressors against his law, and above all, against the first and great commandment which demands the constant supremacy of divine love—if their state was such as to require this sacrifice on the part of Christ, how could they, as they were, become the subjects of his kingdom, members of his church, living stones in his holy temple? There must be for them, in order to this, a revolution and contrast as there was for Christ,—the destruction of life in order to save it. To preserve what they had,—these blind misconceptions which made them even opponents and reprovers of the Son of God, these corrupt tendencies and earthward affections, was to destroy themselves. To be thus was to be all unmeet for the heavenly kingdom, and the true service of its sovereign. There must be for them a radical and thorough change. They, too, must be crucified. Their old man must suffer death. In order truly to live, they must be created anew. To cling as they had been doing to the earth, and its honours and enjoyments,—to save, to preserve the life they now had, to make it more honourable, loveable, and glorious, was to lose all, to lose the true life. To give up all this, to lose their present and past life, was really to save it. In their discipleship and following after Christ, it was needful that they should surrender far more than they had yet done, not merely that they should part with their goods and possessions, but also with themselves. Their life must be the reflection of Christ's life. To go after him they must go to death.

Therefore he announces this as the universal law of the Christian life. "If any man will come after me, let him

deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." To this law there is no exception. He that is truly a Christian has denied himself and is crucified. In all this Christ has gone before us, and all this is essential to the Christian life. Christ's personal sacrifice is denuded of its profound meaning unless it be so. There was no need for it, if we can carry what we have and are, into the heavenly kingdom. These sufferings and death of Christ always proclaim that it is not so, that to be as we are is to be outcast and condemned—that we must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God,—that we must die in order to live—that we must part with everything in order to gain the peril of great price.

1st, To be a Christian I must deny myself, and this means something far higher and greater than the obligation to refrain from certain indulgences in which heretofore I may have delighted. It is true that this is necessary. I cannot deny myself if I retain these. I must, as a Christian, give up, in this outward visible life, much that the world delights in. My path is not so broad as theirs. I cannot conform to their rule of life. That which I find leads me to forget God, and that eternity to which I am hastening, I must shun, however harmless it may seem. I must give up the whole round of what the world has called emphatically its pleasures. I must surrender my worldly companionships and friendships. But this is not all, this is scarcely even to begin. To do this and nothing more would be to make myself an ascetic and not a Christian. Here, as elsewhere, Popery has caricatured Christianity instead of acting it out. Fleeing from these things into the monk's or hermit's cell, I do not necessarily escape from those evils which lie far deeper, the very evils which have created these dangers of the world, and made them formidable. To me the world and its occupations are evil, just when my heart is devoted to them. To retire

from them all, may not be to deny, but to indulge myself. To deny myself cannot merely mean that I am to give up one thing or another in which I have taken pleasure. It is not so much what is external to me that I must forsake and deny, but what is within me, what I am and have been. It is to give up my own will, and views, and affections, for God's will, and purposes, and desires. It is so to acquiesce and fall in with God's sayings, and demands, and arrangements, that they shall become truly mine, the very things which I also wish and require,—to pass out of myself, and enter into the mind and will of the Lord. To become thus self-denied is not to become morose and ascetic, to frown on mankind and to dissociate myself from all their interests. It is the very reverse. It is then for the first time that I become intensely human, humble, loving, cheerful, the child of him who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Having no selfish object of my own to attain, I become then the servant and the promoter of others weal.

Thus and thus only can I come after Christ. He also, in the highest sense, was self-denied. In becoming a servant, the surety and substitute of his people, he pleased not himself. He surrendered himself absolutely to the gracious will and purpose of his Father—gave up not only the glory which he had with the Father before the world was—his dignity and power, as the creator and upholder of all things—and the delight he had when rejoicing always in the presence of the Father; nay, more in becoming man, he gave up his own will, and intelligence, and affections, as a man, into the Father's hands, and set himself to do what the Father willed—to speak what the Father told him—to desire what the Father purposed—"Lo I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of me—I delight to do thy will, O my

God, yea thy law is within my heart." In such a surrender as this, in the giving up of all, there was doubtless a struggle ; and there was self-denial in becoming what he was, and in enduring what he had to suffer. To him rest and peace were loveable, yet he gave them up for incessant labour and strife—pleasant food was desirable, yet he consented to suffer the pangs of hunger—the confidence and love and sweet fellowship of friends, how dear they were to his pure and sensitive heart ! yet he consented to be despised and rejected, and betrayed and denied, and forsaken—to give up all—to deny himself to all—and to stand alone in his agony in the garden and on the cross. He, when he became identified with his sinful people, must become self-denied—separated from all that he loved, and must learn obedience by the things which he suffered. And he so learned and practised self-denial that it was to him not painful, but delightful—it was his meat to do the will of his Father.

Here is the pattern of what it behoves us to do and to become. It was for us, and because we had a nature opposed to God, that Jesus became self-denied. To become truly his children and willing servants, there must be in us a complete and thorough change. All must be given up—ourselves, our possessions, our righteousness, our sins. For everything in us is either against God or unworthy of him. We cannot be complete in ourselves, and must therefore become the property and servants of God. Most blessed exchange ! It is to part with misery in order to perfect peace. I have nothing to bring into the kingdom of God, and must become absolutely poor in order to inherit it. But in abandoning all that is mine, I pass into, and become possessed of, the fulness of Christ. In becoming less than a beggar, I become more than a king. In this utter poverty I find boundless wealth—in my helplessness I obtain the



power to do all things—in my blindness I reach the unclouded light of wisdom—having nothing, I become possessed of all things. All old things must pass away, in order that all things may become new.

2d, The follower of Christ must take up his cross. This obligation is capable of being distinguished from self-denial. Self-denial, indeed, includes taking up the cross. For to be thoroughly self-denied, is to be crucified, and to do and endure whatever the will of God is. But crucifixion is such a marked and peculiar kind of self-denial, that Jesus notices it as a separate and distinct obligation. It is well worth being so regarded. What, then, is this cross?

1st, What was it to Christ? It stood conspicuously apart in his history. It included disgrace—protracted suffering—death. To bear the cross was to be proclaimed a criminal in the very highest degree—to endure the acutest and most protracted agony—and finally to die. But the cross of Christ did not consist merely in this bodily anguish. That cross was not a human but a divine punishment—it was laid on him by the Father, and it was the Father's wrath he had to abide on it, as an expiation for human guilt. So, 2d, in this our crucifixion, it is fundamentally with God that we have to do. To take up the cross is not merely to bear meekly human wrongs and oppressions—to submit to the manifold ills which are incident to humanity—bravely to buffet the waves of adversity—to experience poverty or sore bereavements, or the injustice and ingratitude and persecution of men. It is not to assume burdens and crosses of our own, as all false religions require, and to endure self-imposed tortures—it is simply to take up the cross which the Lord lays on us, whatever that may be—to have to do with God in it, and to take it up, because He has made it our cross.

That cross must be borne by me, not merely as the termination of a life of humiliation, but it must be borne daily, as Luke reports these words of Jesus. I must either be Christless and unsaved, else I must be a daily cross-bearer—and that as involving disgrace, suffering, death. *Disgrace*—To the Lord belongeth righteousness—to me daily, therefore, there are shame and confusion of face, conscious guilt, criminality, and the desert of death. *Suffering*—To me there is chastisement—outward or inward—whereby the evil of my nature is to be cauterised and scourged out of me. *Death*—The extirpation of that corrupt, carnal nature which is enmity against God—the death of what I was, in order to my resurrection into a new life. This is the essence of cross-bearing under all its outward forms. In manifold ways God may accomplish this crucifixion in me. But the thing to be done is always the same, namely, the complete extinguishment of all my carnal hopes, the quenching of all my carnal affections, the destruction of the old man in his desires and deeds, and out of that death, the birth into a new life, and to a heavenly destiny. Apart from all external violence this crucifixion may be daily endured. It is essential that the cross be borne. And, with a conscience quickened and purified by the Divine Spirit, and a will renewed by His gracious power, I may experience as much mortification and shame and utter abandonment as if I had been condemned by a human judge, and had been forsaken by friends and hated and spurned of all men—I may feel as truly that there is nothing of this world on which I can lean, and in which I can trust—that it, with all its crowd of hopes and fears, its vain triumphs and confidences, is not my rest, but my enemy, and that I must be crucified to it and it to me. When I embrace Christ, it is like him to suffer death. Looking to him, I take up also his cross, and by

the path of humiliation and shame and repentant tears, and ceaseless conflict, at last reach the termination of my earthward life, and die. But yet, in that death I am victorious—in thus losing my life, I save it. The body of sin and death has been destroyed, not unto the annihilation of the man, but unto a blessed and glorious resurrection.

#### § IV. THE WORLD OR THE SOUL ?

At this point Jesus proposes to the disciples a question in exchange or bargain making. “What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” It is a question which it should not be very difficult to answer. The quantities, it is true, on either side of the balance, appear to be very large, but surely it should be easy to estimate their relative value. Here, as in many other things, it is not that which has the largest apparent bulk which is of the greatest intrinsic worth. This is observable in the exchanges which are made every day of the different commodities belonging to this world. For a very small quantity of gold you can purchase a large quantity of the commonest and cheapest products of the earth. Between the soul and the world, however, we can scarcely make such comparisons. For the soul is not under the limitations of space. Itself invisible, and apparently residing within the frail tabernacle of the body, its thoughts and aspirations yet wander through eternity, and it can comprehend within itself not only this little globe of earth, but the far grander objects which fill the illimitable universe. But the question, after all, is not one of dimension but of value. Which of these is the more precious commodity—the world or the soul? Which of them shall we buy, and henceforth possess as ours?

It is a question not of vain curiosity, with the solution of which we may engage a leisure hour, or which we may leave altogether unsolved. It is not a question of mere speculation, but the most practical of all questions. It is a kind of bargain making from which we cannot turn aside. It is an exchange which, in point of fact, every man makes. This is its grand peculiarity. The merchant makes what bargains he chooses. If the exchange does not seem to him advantageous, he simply declines to make it. It is not absolutely necessary that he should trade in any commodity which he does not like to have. But this exchange cannot be let alone. The question of the text demands and practically receives its solution from every man.

You cannot be without both the world and the soul. This is evident enough. But then the matter does not present itself to men in the light in which the text reveals it. It is only in the Bible that you find these two quantities put on alternative sides. God assures you that you cannot have them both, that you must make your choice between the one and the other. It is here always that the mind and wisdom of God are in conflict with those of men. They will not believe that these things are in opposite scales—they believe that they can have both the world and the soul, and that it belongs to them to make the best of them both. The soul they *have* already, and do not mean to part with it. They must have *it*, at least, in order to the real possession of anything else. To lose the soul evidently would be to lose every thing. But then, this is what peculiarly and inherently belongs to every man, and therefore it cannot well be lost. Without it, indeed, the world, the wide universe, could be to them nothing. In the soul lies the essence of all enjoyment. It looks out through the eyes, and it drinks in pleasant sounds, and is the seat of all sensa-

tion. It imagines, and loves, and thinks. It makes things valueless or precious by the associations with which it links them. Without the soul nothing can have any worth. But then, while all this is evidently true,—while no man doubts that it is the soul which measures, and apprehends, and enjoys,—that apart from it nothing can be rich or precious,—there is at the same time the persuasion that such an alternative as that of the text is not really presented to them. They will have both the soul and the world. They will, in fact, employ the soul in earning the world, and will make sure, in this way, of the best possible bargain. This reason of the soul, its imagination and affections, shall all go forth into the best markets of the world, and gather in its various treasures, and rejoice over the splendid acquisitions they have made. The soul shall not be the less theirs that the world has also become theirs.

Thus it is that men reason and act, and no doubt the attainment of such a result has an air of plausibility. The soul, in fact, is felt not to be self-sufficient. No man can truly say, my mind to me a kingdom is. The soul is endowed with energies, hopes, and desires, which lead it out of itself, which constrains it to draw into itself that in which it delights. And it does not thereby exhaust, but strengthen itself. Every advancement thus made adds to its power, every desire gratified gives to it a new experience, every hope realised is a fresh acquisition; the very forth-putting of energy, even when there is disappointment, is a new element of strength. To possess the soul, it is not necessary that it should lie dormant; on the contrary, in this condition it would be really lost. In putting forth its faculties, it does not lose nor exhaust them. If it do not add to their number, it at least increases their power and their susceptibility of enjoyment. In acquiring the world



then, what is it but to add to the acquisitions and endowments of the soul itself, and to give it a wider field of expansion, and to develop its latent energies?

The real difficulty, then, of the question propounded in the text lies here. Must I put the soul and the world in opposite scales? Is this exchange to me a matter of absolute necessity? That question being conclusively settled, all the rest becomes quite easy. For no man, deliberately and of set purpose, would give his soul for the world, knowing and believing that the acquisition of the world involved the loss of his soul. Such folly would imply that the soul had been already lost, that the light of reason had been altogether darkened, and the mind denuded of its distinguishing properties. Yet, if the Bible be true, there must be some important sense in which it is a fact that the gain of the world involves the loss of the soul. The text asserts this in language the most unmistakeable.

Let us endeavour to ascertain what it means in making this assertion, and in order to this—

1. Let us bear in mind that the soul is not self-sufficient, that it must go out of itself, and must rest in something or exercise itself on something external to itself. This is proved by its whole actings, development, and education. It is true, indeed, that the soul is capable of reflection, but even when exercising this power, it is employed chiefly on materials that are foreign to itself. What would the soul be by itself, exercised only upon itself, destitute of all means of communication with that which is without and beyond itself? We can but dimly imagine such a state. But all that we know of the workings of the soul, leads to the conclusion, that but for the things beyond itself, and its communication with these, its whole faculties would lie dormant, and it could reach no higher development than a

kind of dim self-consciousness, leading to no action, and achieving no result, and possessing no enjoyment. Reason, imagination, affection, hope, benevolence, veneration, conscience, even the action of the will itself, all presuppose and imply a something beyond the soul, on which it is to fasten itself, and by feeding on that, to be nursed to maturity, and to have its sphere both of action and enjoyment. This is the condition of all intelligent creature existence, and still more emphatically if that creature have a moral sense and responsibilities, as man has. It belongs to God only to be self-sufficient and independent.

2. This then being the case, what is the relation established between the soul and the things on which it feeds? Must not they have a common life and destiny? If they are perishable, what becomes of it? It does not indeed die with them, for its existence is independent of, and apart from, theirs. Nay the fact that it feeds upon and uses them is a proof of its superiority. The soul then does not die, though the fashion of these perish. But may it not in the highest sense be lost when they disappear? Might it not be better that it should perish with them than that it should survive them? Will it not, when they are gone, only be alive to misery? It is quite vain to assert its pride of independence. All which makes up the soul, its various faculties and affections, or its different states or modes of action, are dependent, and in such a sense that when the objects on which it rests are withdrawn, nothing is left for it but a wide inheritance of woe, of utter desolation and despair. Now nothing is more certain than that such a separation must come between the soul and the world. The bond which connects us with this world must sooner or later be severed. We pass onward to the gates of death and disappear, or those who are around us and dearest to us die,

and the fashion of the world passeth away, and the time is hastening on when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the present order of things shall be dissolved. In some form or other the connection we have had with the world shall be broken, and then, if the soul has been resting only on it, expatiating with its far-reaching power of hope and affection only in it, what remains? Disappointments, ungratified longings, blighted affections, thwarted ambition, a mind quickened to action by the world and the things it contains, and sustained by these; and left at last stranded on the eternal shore, without an object to love, without a hope to lighten the darkness of despair. Is not such a soul in the truest and most profound sense a lost one, unable now to retreat into stupid dormancy, and yet drifted from all its anchorage of desire and anticipation,—a wreck upon a shoreless sea;—the old passions of covetousness, and lust, and envy, and pride, and love of glory, wasting their energies on the soul itself, and drowning the clearness and pride of reason, in fathomless despair. Then at last, if not before, it will be seen that this is the alternative, the world or the soul, that to have both is impossible, that to gain the one is to lose the other.

But if *now*, foreseeing this, I make up my mind to choose, if this bargain becomes to me a necessity, and if, as everything in my soul dictates, I choose the loss of the world and the gain of the soul, what then? What of the world—what is my relation to it? Must I fling it utterly away, or go out of it? Must I cut asunder all those bonds which unite me to it, and hasten to some ethereal region where I shall find new objects on which to put forth my energies, and on which my soul may feed and grow? These are questions which press themselves upon the consideration of every man who seriously and fairly considers what is involved in the

exchange between the world and the soul. In ordinary bargain-making I cannot have both the thing purchased and the price paid for it, and from the statement of the text it would appear that in this bargain I cannot do so. If, on the one hand, I am to gain the world, I must lose my soul. If, on the other hand, I gain my soul, I lose the world. But does not the making of such a bargain seem to anticipate what death will one day bring to pass ? Could it be God's design and purpose with me, so soon as I have made the right choice, that I should break with the world at once and for ever, and be no more in it or of it ?

1. The easiest solution of this difficult question is that which very many adopt, however unsatisfactory it may be. If I am not called upon to commit suicide and so to leave the world, may I not postpone the making of this bargain ? Is it not best to fix for its conclusive settlement a future date ? —to form now the wise purpose of effecting the exchange, but to conclude the bargain only when I have no other alternative—to preserve my relation to the world till I must abandon it, and then to part with it for the sake of the soul. But then you cannot fail to perceive that there is a moral element in this bargain ; that the giving up and the acquisition must be voluntary ; that if the exchange is really made it must be a matter of deliberate choice. It is no bargain when an Eastern caravan is attacked by the robbers of the desert, and the lives of the merchants who compose it are saved at the expense of all they had. They did not part with their goods for the sake of their lives. Their goods were merely taken away and their lives were spared. Now it is essential to this bargain, that in making it you do not submit to force merely, but that you act from free choice. You do not save the soul by having the world taken from you. Are you sure, then, that on a death-bed that you will be able

more willingly to part with the world than you are now? Is this at all likely? Nay, is it not true that, from the moment this alternative has been proposed to you, from the time when God has said to you, will you have the world or the soul? that you have actually concluded this bargain and made your choice, and that, if you are still of the world, you have cast away your soul for the acquisition of the world? In this case to postpone the bargain is always really to conclude it. You deceive yourself in thinking that you are free. You have laid hold on the world to have and to keep, to live in and worship and serve. It is true, indeed, that God in his unspeakable mercy has given you a space for repentance. You may yet rue the foolish bargain you have made. Your choice is not yet irremediable. But, if it be not, do not, I beseech you, make it so by again deliberately rejecting the soul and choosing the world. What! do you now find the choice so easy that you can count upon making up your mind regarding it in a moment, and that, too, the moment of death. What makes the choice so difficult? What leads you to hesitate now about making it finally? It is not, it cannot be, any doubt you have regarding the relative value of the things in your choice. It is the fact that the world has become so closely related to you that the riches and resources, the rest and home of your soul, are in it—that you have so enveloped yourself in its pursuits, and pleasures, and passions, that to give them up would be to strip you naked and bare, and to make you poor, and destitute, and miserable. But if there is ever to be to you an emancipation from these bonds, another home and more blessed environments for the soul, it is easier to seek them now than it can be at any future time. If these hopes and affections of yours are ever to get beyond the earth, to soar into a higher and purer region, and to find a surer resting-



place, it must be easier to seek such a home now, than when by longer custom you have rivetted every bond by which you are united to the world. It is easier to part with a property you may have bought only yesterday, than that which has descended to you from past generations. To sell an estate in the midst of which you have grown up, where every apartment in the mansion, and every tree and field around it, have gathered about them the memories and associations of long years, is intensely painful, however profitable the bargain may be. To sell the goods you have made or purchased but yesterday, causes no pain, unless for the loss that may be incurred by the bargain.

2. There are some who have put another sense upon the alternative presented in this bargain, and have believed, or acted as if they believed, that parting with the world meant the abandonment of the common business of life, with its manifold responsibilities and duties, and who have sought to save their souls by retreating into monastic cells, and taking upon them monastic vows. Alas for the disappointment which such a course must create ! The world sits far too near the heart to be shut out by gates and bars, and the strictest routine of devotional exercises. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life have been carried into the most sacred retreats. A change that is merely external cannot effect a separation from the world, and cannot save the soul, nor can a vow of poverty destroy the lust of covetousness. The world which I am to part with in order to save my soul, is not so much that world which is round about me, in its riches, or in the various avocations to which it gives birth, as the world which I have clasped to my heart, which the soul has entwined with itself, in which I am trusting, and for which I live. It is not enough for me,—in fact, it is not even to begin to relin-

quish the world, to retire from the scenes and the business of common life ; for I *can*, and if this be all, I *must* carry into my retirement all my worldly feelings, and desires, and hopes. I have already, long ago, contracted this fatal bargain. I have chosen the world as my portion, in the very outgoings of my heart and mind towards it, and cannot lift myself into a higher and purer region, except by a change effected upon my inner nature. The world is still my only portion, if my hope, and trust, and desire are in it. To have these transferred to other worthier, unchanging, everlasting objects, this is the difficulty, this is the real relinquishment of the world, this is the salvation of the soul. Worldly occupations are not necessarily inconsistent with this state of mind. The apostle Paul did not pollute his soul by labouring as a tent maker.

3. What then is the real relation in which a saved soul stands to the world ? It is not necessary to go out of the world, or to quit its business and duties ; it may not be even necessary to change our external position at all. But it is, while in the world, to live by the powers of the world to come—to cease to make this our home—the resting-place and object of our highest affections. It is to have eternity nearer the heart than the world—by faith to enter within the region of the invisible—and to cleave with the whole heart to that which is there revealed. It is to be lifted out of the miry clay, and to lay hold on that all powerful arm stretched forth to deliver us—to enter into new and holy fellowships within that home and rest which is prepared for the people of God—to have our hope entering into that which is within the veil, and thus becoming an anchor to the soul, to have our home and rest in the bosom of the Father. This is to save the soul ; for to fasten and feed on these objects can never end in desolation and misery. For these

are amaranthine flowers that strew the eternal pathway, and its trees never fade, and its river of life is never dry, and its immortal inhabitants know no parting tears, and there is no curse there, and no night, and no temple, and the Lord God giveth them light, and they reign for ever and ever. Thither Christ has gone, and thither by the cross and self-denial he invites us to follow him. He himself is the way, the truth, and the life. He hath come down hither and made himself a brother to us, to lead us out of our misery—to break that hard and foolish bargain which we had made with the world, and to lead us forth into light and liberty.

Nor is it needful, that in repenting our first bad bargain, and now at last making a wiser one, and choosing the good part which shall never be taken away from us, that we should greatly, if at all, change our position externally. The man of busy occupation, who, in order to prosecute his daily calling, has gone forth from a peaceful and happy home, carries with him in his heart the objects of love he has left there. They are around him and with him on sea or land, in the field or in the market place, and nerve his arm for labour, and seem to smile upon his successes ; they shed light upon his darkest path, and become the main object and end of his labour, as they animate him with courage to endure it. Even thus it is with the man who has made the wise choice, and saved his soul. Within the circle of the world's environments, and lying far nearer his heart, are unseen beings who have gone forth with him into the hard battle of life, not an earthly family, indeed, but a heavenly one, a Father, and an elder brother, who by his manifold sacrifices and services fills the place of all relationships, and has become all his salvation and all his desire. In the world this man is not of it. He belongs

to a heavenly family, and has a better inheritance. His home is in the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Encompassed thus, and thus sustained, his every occupation becomes a sacred service, and the object and end of all his travail is that God whom he serves and loves. Truly this man has chosen the better part.

To choose the other alternative, is indeed to lose everything. For even this world does not in truth become ours when we have chosen it as our portion. On this side of the alternative lie the snares and delusions of Satan, and at every step we are mocked by mere shadows. In seeking to make the world ours, we become the property and servants of the world, and enlist ourselves to a servitude for which there are no adequate wages. He is not the master of the world to whom it has become a portion ; but has become its victim and slave. That man has truly the mastery over it who is able to use it as his servant, for the accomplishment of higher ends. Christ came hither to place his people in this position, to deliver them from their base servitude, and to make the world their servant. And in ceasing to be the world's and in becoming Christ's we can therefore lose nothing. Nay, it is then, that all things, including even the world itself, become ours.

#### § V. SHAME AND ITS RETRIBUTION.

The world and the soul—these are the alternative possessions which Jesus has been presenting to the minds of his disciples, pressing upon them the conviction that they were really alternatives—that it was an urgent present question with them, the keeping of the world or the keeping of the soul—the losing of the world or the losing of the

soul—that the preservation of the one inevitably involved the loss of the other—that, with a wise man there should be no hesitation in concluding this bargain, for to lose the soul was evidently, in the end, to lose everything. They must make up their minds, then, to part with the world as the only course of wisdom and of safety. To accomplish this it was not necessary for them to go out of the world, or that they should become monks or hermits in it—that they should take vows of poverty or of celibacy. To do all this was not necessarily to give up the world, as both experience and reason abundantly testify. A higher and worthier sacrifice was demanded, and a more thorough surrender of the world—that they should separate the supreme love of it, and confidence in it, from their heart—that it should cease to be intimately entwined with their highest affections and hopes—that they should have something higher, better, and dearer than it, and cleaving to their souls more closely—something that should be all their desire, as it would be all their salvation—that the world should be crucified to them, and they to the world, by the cross of Christ, which must ever be an offence to those whose home and rest are in the world.

It is in this connection that Jesus here presents this sacrifice of the world, as Paul afterwards did. His predicted sufferings and death were offensive to the disciples now, because their hearts were yet in the world, and its ambitious hopes were still reigning in them. It was by loving the cross of Christ, and glorying in it, that these hopes and desires were to be crucified. Then, when they truly knew Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings, and with a believing eye looked into the depths of that love which passeth knowledge, and knew that the opposition of the world to God lay at the root of the Saviour's agony—was



the very spear which was thrust into his side—they could no longer put their hands to that spear and draw forth afresh the life-blood of the Saviour. Then, they would see that there must be with them either a crucifixion of the world or a crucifixion of Christ, and that to stand with him in his death was to give up the world. And to all who believe, as unto them, belongs the same spiritual history—for to embrace the cross is always to crucify the world, to have something far better, dearer, more enduring than it.

To surrender the world is necessarily to cease to have property in it. When we have Christ the world is no longer ours. Christ is ours, and he is all. That which we once called ours, and by doing so proclaimed our alienation from, and rebellion against God, we give up to him as rightfully his. Our relation to the world henceforth is not that of masters but of stewards. What is in our possession—houses, lands, money, children, faculties, opportunities—are ours in trust merely, to be employed for God, to be turned to account in his service, as things consecrated. For in the act of faith, have not Christ and we become one? and so, what is his becomes ours, and what was ours becomes his. We cannot appropriate what he gives us unless in the unreserved surrender to him of what we have. The union is nominal merely, and not real and vital unless it be so. Christ takes us and ours, when we take him and his.

In immediate connection with the statement regarding this most important and vital of all transactions—namely, the giving up of the world for the safety of the soul—Jesus introduces another idea which unfolds to us more clearly the hostile relation in which the world and the soul stand to each other. This he states by way of inference from the question which he has put, “Whosoever *therefore* shall be ashamed of me and of my words,” &c.

Matthew has omitted this inference, which we find with some slight difference of phraseology both in Mark and Luke. It is plain that the verse which we find in Matthew, then, is not parallel to that which we find in the other two evangelists. It has not the same meaning, and doesn't even imply the same truth. On an attentive comparison, we shall find that Mark and Luke have omitted what Matthew has recorded, and, on the other hand, that Matthew has omitted what they have inserted. To understand what Jesus spoke on this occasion it is necessary to read ver. 38 of Mark, and ver. 27 of Matthew, as a continuous narrative thus: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works." In the text thus read, then, we have a twofold statement brought before us. 1st, An argument grounded on the fact that to cleave to the world is to be ashamed of Christ; and, 2d, The just retribution of such sin and folly. Let us attend to these two things in their order.

1st, To keep the world or to gain it, is to be ashamed of Christ. Here Jesus translates the question he had put from its abstract form, into a shape more likely to tell directly and forcibly upon the hearts of his disciples. But little is practically gained by teaching a man that the soul is better than the world, that the interests of the one are unspeakably higher than those of the other. In spite of this knowledge, and while admitting it to its fullest extent, the world is still loved, and so the soul is lost. There is nothing in the balancing of these quantities which shows that the possession of the one involves the loss of the other—nothing to con-

strain us really to strike the bargain and to effect the blessed exchange. It is not easy always to say what is best for the soul, and the injuries it sustains are not always perceptible at the moment when they are received. Jesus therefore now puts the case differently. Instead of sending the disciples into the region of psychological enquiry, he brings them at once into that light in which alone all Christian truth becomes plainly legible. Instead of setting them to read in their own hearts the record of the mutual relations between them and the world, and the injurious action of the one upon the other, he desires them to look to him. It was in his incarnation, in his life and death, that they would become able to ascertain how essential it was to exchange the world for the soul, to give up the one that they might keep the other.

In substance, then, his argument is this: You have owned, and truly owned me to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Under the veil of my lowly humanity, you have read this glorious truth. My Father has taught it to you, and you have believed and confessed it. You see what I am and have been as a man—not rich, nor honoured, not in a king's palace, nor seated on a throne—but the companion of humble fishermen, not more free than you from poverty, and labours, and hardships. But you have not yet seen all that I am destined to be. You have seen me without a home in which to dwell—driven forth in disgrace from my native town, living on the common charities of the benevolent—you will see me yet more conspicuously a victim of obloquy and injustice. The elders and chief priests and scribes will combine to inflict their malice upon me, and will not suffer me even to live. All that the world esteems—all that constitutes its glory and pride—will array itself against me—will not, as hitherto, despise me, but reject and cast me out

as evil. Its wealth, its learning, its power, its priestcraft and statecraft, all of which the world consists, will unite to oppose and to destroy me. It and I are and must be on opposite sides. If, as yet, you do not see and feel this opposition in yourselves, you may at least plainly see it in me. It is implied in the very fact of my incarnation. It will be more plainly written yet in the fact of my crucifixion. It is not man's righteousness which has brought me into the world, but man's immeasurable guilt. It is not the world's loveliness which has drawn me down from above, but the world's filthiness and misery. I cannot be identified with it, nor it with me. I am come to send fire on the earth, to destroy its corruption, and not to honour and adorn it. It therefore hates me, and exposes me to suffering and death. I must be its victim in order to become its Saviour. But you have also seen my glory—the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. You have followed and loved me, even before you distinctly apprehended this glory ; but now that you have seen it, and witnessed such a good confession, which side will you take in the coming conflict ? Are you able to drink of my cup and to be baptized with my baptism ? To you evidently there is but one alternative—the world's friendship, or mine. On whose side will you be ? You cannot espouse the cause of both. You cannot cleave to both. Evidently we are on opposite sides already, and the conflict between us is a mortal one. My path in this world must be one ever downward into deeper darkness, till it terminate in a shameful death. Will you follow me onward along that path ? You already shrink from its darkness and desolation. You are disappointed and angry when I tell you what awaits me. Will you shrink from my side in shame when the whole world disowns, abjures, and casts me out as evil ? At that crisis,

even as now, the alternative must be the world or me. To the eye of sense the world appears a better portion. But have you not received a clearer, better vision, whereby you have discerned the incarnate Christ, the Son of the living God? Even in my death I am the source and prince of life. On my side, after all, is safety. Ashamed of me you gain the world indeed, but then you lose the soul. Do you not yet see that from that cross of mine, from which you shrink, comes the salvation of the soul—that this is the meaning and purpose of my incarnation? The root of your guilt lies in this, that you have loved and served the creature more than the Creator, and the continued indulgence of that love must destroy you. It is the enemy of God, and to love it is to hate Him. It will crucify me, and to take part with it is to become participant in that act, and thus to consummate your daring rebellion, and ensure your destruction. You have owned me as the Christ, and to be on my side, therefore, is to be with God, but then it is also to be against the world. The struggle, for you, will be a hard one, harder even than you can now imagine, for it involves in the truest and deepest sense the giving up of the world, of all that you admire and love in it, your country, your friends, your past education, all the deep impressions which the world has made upon your souls. You will need to keep a firm hold of that glorious truth which you have confessed in order to sustain you in the coming storm. When you shall behold me sunk in overwhelming sorrow, tortured with mental agony, betrayed, apprehended, spit upon, dealt with as the offscouring of all things—tried, sentenced, dragged to death—then will you not be ashamed, and hide your faces from me? Will you remember that I am the Christ the Son of the living God? If you can go with me to that cross, and own me there in



the full assembly of the scorers, then indeed you have given up the world and saved your soul. But if not, what then?—if you falter, if you deny me, what is this but to cleave to the world, and to destroy your soul?

Thus Jesus presents to them by anticipation this great truth. He ripens their minds to embrace it, and prepares them for making, deliberately and decidedly, the choice between the soul and the world. They might not be able to see, in the very nature of things, that this choice must be made. But in his life and death lay the demonstration of the fact. It was not an abstract doctrine of philosophy, but must be to them a real historical fact, brought out in their choice or rejection of him. If the world was not lost to them, they must be ashamed of Christ and his words. It was impossible for them, at the same time, to love the world and to cleave to Christ. He was already of the lowest of the people, and was to descend yet lower, even to a criminal's doom. To espouse his cause, to be on his side, was to espouse the cause of a condemned malefactor—to be against all the fashion, opinion, power, law, and religion of the age, and to stand forth enduring the frown of all these, and to expose themselves to his very doom. To them there was but this one alternative, to be ashamed of Christ, or to renounce the world.

But is it so now? Is this the alternative for believers still? Must we also make this momentous choice? Were these words of Jesus of mere temporary significance, and thus unlike all the other words which he uttered? Is there no shame in the cross now? Has Christ become a prince of this world, so that when I am on his side, I am with the world. The tests indeed are not now quite the same in their outward form as in those days. But it is still true that the world and Jesus are on opposite sides, and that

the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Christ is not now, as in the Jewish and Roman community, regarded merely in the light of a condemned criminal. The cross has had its outward as well as its internal triumphs. It is no longer the signal of disgrace, and the warrant for cruel persecution. Christ has been recognised as a conqueror—not merely as killed, but as risen again, and the cross has been invested with a glory, before which even worldly men consent to do reverence. It is more a matter of shame among us to be an atheist, than to be a Christian. No one is now ashamed to be in the church—to be recognised as a believer in the Bible—to be known as a member of the Christian family, and as sitting at the table of the Lord. The shame lies all on the other side. It is rather scandalous than otherwise not to be all this. Christ, therefore, would appear so far to have overcome the world, as to have entirely changed his position in it. The glory is now his, and shame is the portion of the world.

Thus, indeed, the case stands outwardly, and when we look at the Christian profession in its mere worldly aspects. But let us look a little deeper. Let us observe more closely this life of ours in its various aspects and in its relation to Christ and his words. Let us examine its earnest, habitual business, its social intercourse, its inner current of thought and feeling. When and how, in all these, does Christ appear? Is the cross borne through them all? What confession do we make of him? What submission is there to his will? What predominance of Christian sentiment in our hearts? It is indeed a compliment to Christian truth that the world affects to believe it, and assumes the religion of Jesus somewhat as the Crusaders did of old. They have marked with his cross their banners and their garments. But to assume these outward badges is not to espouse Christ's cause, nor to

give up the world. This is rather to betray than to promote his cause—to worship the world under the pretext of serving Christ. Is it not demonstrated in the whole life of such Christians, that the world and Christ are still upon opposite sides? You have not harmonised them by professing to serve them both. The Christian camp is to you the seat of a hostile army, and you move about in it as a spy and a traitor. You hide yourself from the Captain of the Lord's host, and have no cordial fellowship with the soldiers of the cross. That cross, indeed, has been blazoned on your outer garment, but you have not taken it up as yours. The world is still your motive and aim, the seat of your hope and affections, the stay and confidence of your soul. It is the world that is ever uppermost in your family, in the market, in all your intercourse with men. Christ is buried out of sight, as if you had no concern with him. You own him, indeed, in the assembly of his saints, as Peter did of old; but in the high-priest's hall, in the mart of business, and in the concourse of worldly men, you deny him—sometimes, it is to be feared, even with oaths and curses. Your language has not the tone of a Galilean.

I am quite sensible of the offensiveness of a mere pharisaic profession, of that ostentation and obtrusiveness in conformity with which the broad phylactery is worn, and under the guise of which all manner of dishonesty and deceit are practiced. But if your religion be real, why is it kept so studiously out of sight—why are you afraid to act avowedly under the influence of Christian motives and responsibilities? If you are a Christian in the church, why are you not a Christian everywhere? If the religion of Christ has laid hold of, and is occupying your heart, it must manifest itself. You will not need to try to shew it. It will manifest itself and radiate from you as the light.

Let us bear in mind the fact that the thing in the world which exhibited the earliest and most deadly hostility to Christ was its religion. It was not so much the Roman paganism as the Jewish religion that crucified the Son of God. Their religion was a thing of the world, and the worst thing in it—a servitude of Satan under the name of a divine service, and so *it* especially hated Christ, and was foremost in rejecting him. And that, too, was a religion which received the Bible, and hoped in the Messiah, and owned the name of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ! And yet it was essentially and throughout a service of the world. It despised, rejected, crucified, and was thoroughly ashamed of Christ. Is our religion really better than this? Let us take heed to ourselves. Let us not cheat ourselves with names and mere formal religious acts. If we love the world we yet hate Christ. His service demands the surrender of the world. The safety of the soul is incompatible with the retaining of the world. We are yet ashamed of Christ, and in our whole lives disown him, if our object be the gain of the world.

2. But what shall the end of these things be? The time is hastening on when there shall be a change of places, when the glory shall be Christ's and the shame shall be the world's. You that serve the world and love it shall experience a just retribution. In vain shall ye call on its mountains and rocks to fall on you and cover you from the wrath of the Lamb. The Son of Man—he from whom you have hidden your faces—whose cause you have been ashamed to own, in the society of the indifferent and the ungodly—whose law you durst neither plead nor obey when it was against the current of common opinion and fashion—whose name you blushed to mention—of whom you feared to be recognized as a real and consistent follower—he shall

come in the glory of his Father, and with his holy angels. He whom you have sought to bury out of sight, shall be revealed as *the one* glory of the universe ; He shall come in terrible divine majesty, and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of him ; He shall come in flaming fire, in almighty power, in the infinite perfection of his divine nature, and the throne of judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened, and mere religious professions shall vanish like shadows in the brightness of that glorious light, and every man shall be rewarded according to his works ; He shall come with his holy angels, as the Lord of hosts, encompassed with his armies, with those ministers of his—the reapers who shall gather in the harvest of the world—and time shall be no more, and shame and torment for ever shall be the portion of the world, and the glory of the Lord shall no more be veiled, but give forth its everlasting light, and the mourning of his people shall be ended. True faith even now, amid its conflict with the world, and while contending against its mastery, is able to overleap this visible time, and from the depths of its lowly position to soar upward, and to live in that future glory—in that blessed region of light and love—afar off to behold Christ as seated on his throne, and to say, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. I am not ashamed of Christ, for I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.



## CHAPTER III.

## GLIMPSES OF GLORY.

Matt. xvi. 28, xvii. 1—8. Mark. ix. 1—8. Luke ix 27—36.

## § I. THE KINGDOM COMING WITH POWER.

When Jesus says, “There be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom,” he evidently adverts to a different event from that of which he has spoken in the immediately preceding contest. Each of these events is called the coming of the Son of Man, and yet they are far from being co-incident in time, or even similar in external character. The one is declared to be very near—so near that it would happen in the lifetime of some of those who were then hearing the prediction. The other is certainly more remote—how remote it is not declared, but, from its nature, not to happen till the final consummation of all things. It is to form the grand concluding scene in the history of this world—the winding up of its affairs—and the transition from time into measureless eternity. Then all awards are to be conclusively determined, and all long-endured wrongs to be rectified—righteous judgments for ever triumphant over the wrong ones of the world—that made most glorious which heretofore had been most despised, and that which was once glorious exposed to everlasting shame. The transition which was to be effected in the person of Jesus, from the abasement of a suffering criminal to the glorious majesty

and power of the uncreated Jehovah, is a type and pattern of that change, which his final coming is to effect.

It is to this great event, first of all, that he bids his disciples look, that their minds might be fortified to endure what was before them. Doubtless, it was apparently good and desirable to stand well in the estimation of the world—to be honoured by it—to have its wealth and influence ; but the grave question was, would these rewards endure ? Were these judgments of the world irreversible ? Nay, was it not evident, that they must be overthrown ? That which was true and good could alone be everlasting. Even they could not desire that the false and the bad should be for ever triumphant. How, then, stood the case ? The opinions, the friendship, the judgments of the world, were even now being subjected to the most conclusive and satisfactory of all tests. Here was one whom they knew and acknowledged to be the Christ, the Son of the living God—the impersonation of all truth, and goodness, and love—the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. What opinion had the world of him ? What true friendship had it for him ? What judgment had it to pronounce ? Had it already lifted him from his lowliness, and set him on its throne, and bowed the knee before him ? Was it to do this ? The very reverse. Its law, its religion, its learning, its philosophy, its brute force, had all one uniform judgment. These disowned him, were ashamed of him, condemned and crucified him. Their judgment was not only not just and true, but the reverse of both. The world and God were evidently on extreme opposite sides, and to be with the world was to be against God. This was already as clear as fact and history could make it. To gain the world, therefore, was to lose the soul.

But then this judgment of the world could not stand

It was as if an infuriated mob had outraged the majesty of the law, which must again assert its supremacy. The world could not be stronger than God who made it. The victory must at last be on the side of God. The time would come, therefore, for the reversal of this judgment, when that which was now first would be last, and the last first—when glory and abasement would for ever change places—when the crucified one would be revealed in the glory of his Father and with the holy angels, and when they whom the world had despised and cast out as evil, would be glorified with him—when shame, and destruction, and the criminal's final doom, would be the portion of those who had employed themselves as instruments of cruel wrong. To this final overturn—this reversal of all the world's judgments—Jesus here first directs the attention of his disciples. He calls upon them to make up their minds, in the full view and certainty of it, on whose side they would be.

It is in view of the same grand fact that Jesus makes his appeal to us. Is it worth while to be on the world's side? What are its rewards, even the richest and highest, to be accounted? In the full view of what has been and will be, is not the glory even now on the other side? Is it not more glorious to suffer under an unjust sentence than to inflict it—to be shunned by the vile than to be courted by them? Does not the cross of Christ glorify while it condemns the world? Do we not see in the history of the past that the men most worthy of remembrance are those whom the world has condemned? By the cross, as well as the future crown, we are taught not to be afraid of the world's judgments, its frown, its deadliest hostility. To avoid these is to join issue with the world against God. Let us not dream that the mutual relations between Jesus and the world have been changed. The connection of these two things in

this history—first the cross, and then, in the end, the throne of judgment and the crown, prove that their hostility is invincible and perpetual. The judgment which the world pronounced on Christ was its permanent fixed judgment, which it would continue to repeat till the end. Glory and shame would then change sides, but not till then. The history of the church might, indeed, have many phases ere that time—she might enlarge or decrease—she might be clothed in sackcloth, or crowned with joy—but the world and she would be always on opposite sides, she glorying in what the world was ashamed of, and the world glorying in its opposition to God. Ever more the church must have her eye on the cross and the judgment—on the cross, to teach her the falsehood and injustice of the world's judgments, to shew her its rooted opposition to God—on the judgment, to assure herself of a time for righting all wrongs, and restoring all things to their proper place, when the Son of the living God will assert his supremacy, and his word of condemnation or approval will be the universal law, and the sole arbiter of shame or glory.

But was this all? Was the church to have nothing else to look to, to lean upon, to sustain herself by, through all that long gloomy interval between the cross and the final judgment? Was she to be ever reaching forth only into the remote past and the remote future, during the sore conflict she had to wage against the things of sense and time? Was it to be to her, throughout, a contest between the present and the remote, as well as between the unseen and the visible? No, verily, her gracious Lord hath ordained it otherwise, in merciful adaptation to our fallen nature. As against the present and visible world, he promises her a present and visible Saviour, not withdrawn into the remote heavens, till the final issue, but coming in his kingdom with power—

revealed to the eye of faith and intelligence as an ever-present, all-sufficient, all-conquering Saviour, subduing her to himself, and subduing her enemies, external and internal, and thus surely establishing for himself a kingdom in this world, invincible, impregnable, in virtue of the presence and presiding power of him who wears at his girdle the keys of hell and of death. Even to these first disciples, he says, Ye—some at least among you, for the event is so near—shall see the kingdom coming with power—shall see the Son of Man coming in it. It shall be yours not only to await in hope a future and distant triumph, but to enjoy a present one. You desire and expect a kingdom. This hope, rightly informed and directed, shall not be disappointed—ye shall see it with your own eyes, and the Son of Man coming in it, giving sure evidence of his presence and conquering power—the foreshadowings of future glory and shame—the bringing down of the proud and the triumph of the humble. Thus Jesus speaks to the hope of his disciples.

Some, indeed, have denied that there can be said to be any proper coming of Christ, save as verified by his past advent at the incarnation, and his still future advents at the commencement of the Millennial reign, and at the final judgment. But in spite of all theories we must cleave to the letter of the divine word, and receive that word in its simplicity as Jesus spoke it, and as his disciples must have understood it. Here he tells them that in that generation, ere all of those who were now hearing him should be laid in their graves, they would see him coming in his kingdom, and coming, moreover, with power. Here we have nothing to do with questions and inquiries as to the Millennial coming, but with a coming far more near and immediate than that, even during the life time of those to whom Jesus is speaking. Some of them, he says, would *see* him com-



ing, not indeed with the bodily eye, as they had been seeing him hitherto, but yet with such tokens of his presence that they could not doubt he was there. They would be as sure he was with them as if they saw him with their bodily eyes, as sure as they now were that he was with them even when in the darkness of the night they could not behold him. His power, and grace, and love, would be all manifested in such a way that they could still speak to him as a present friend, and be assured that he heard and was helping them.

The same theorising spirit which has led some to deny the real coming and presence of the Lord Jesus, has also led to the denial of his now having a kingdom on the earth ; and all the precious sayings regarding that kingdom are considered as yet in the future, and to be realised only in the Millennial reign. If it be so, there never was an argument so destitute of meaning as that which Jesus now urges on the attention of his disciples. Evidently he is forewarning them of his speedy advent to establish his kingdom in power, that they might have something else on which to stay their hope, than the promise of his future and yet distant glory. It is certain that the Son of Man shall come in glory, with the angels, and in order that you may be the more assured of it, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." The existence and the establishment of that kingdom shall be to you the pledge and assurance of my future coming in glory. There shall be to you something to hope and rejoice in, between the desolation and misery of the cross, and the world's apparent triumph in it, and the future glory. The kingdom shall be established now, and shall remain invincible, in order to assure you that the dominion under the whole

heaven shall be mine. If there be no such kingdom now, there will be no such kingdom for ever. The evidence that it will be, is the fact that it now is. The church has always this present evidence of the ultimate triumph of her Lord. The church survives all the storms of time, all the opposition of the world. The power which is in it triumphs over all. The existence of the church is the one enduring fact in the history of the earth's empires and manifold revolutions. The world assails it in vain, for it is built on the rock of ages. Even the martyr's death only verifies and assures his conquest, and his blood becomes the seed of the church. Christ reigns in it, and not man's feebleness. He came and is still here in his power, visibly in the midst of his people, covering them with his overshadowing wings, bearing them up in the tempest, or walking with them in the furnace of fire. Still, as of old, the world and Christ are brought into deadly conflict ;—the world-power, apparently mighty, as when it was impersonated in the ancient strength of Babylon—the church apparently feeble, as the three children who were cast into the furnace ; but they are unconsumable, for the Son of Man is with them there. The history of that moment included and manifested the history of ages. The Son of Man comes in his kingdom, and so the gates of hell do not prevail against it. Thus it was in that generation, to whom it was given to see the majestic power of the risen Saviour, to feel his presence pervading their cowardly and selfish natures, and making them victorious in life and death. Thus it was on that pentecostal day, when, being baptized with fire, they recognised the fulfilment of Christ's promise, and knew his present exaltation as the head over all things, and the dispenser of all gracious gifts. Thus it was, when the word went forth from them in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, and when the hearts of thousands

bowed to the yoke of the Saviour, and when the utterance of his name dispelled disease, and revoked the sentence of death, and they felt that there was with them, and living in them, that Son of the living God by whose mighty works they had formerly recognized his Messiahship. Thus it was above all, when, to the few survivors, his arm of vengeful power was revealed, and the reversal of the world's false judgments began—when the wicked city whose people had slain him was converted into heaps of rubbish, and its surviving inhabitants made a hissing and reproach among the nations—when the worship of the temple had ceased for ever, and there was no church of the living God but the Christian. Then, both in the terrors and the deliverances of that fearful time, did they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. The proud were laid low, and the lowly were saved, and exalted, and magnified. The kingdom thus sending forth its roots like Lebanon was a veritable kingdom, with a real, living, present king. It constituted a new and blessed theocracy, with its divine laws and institutions, its supreme sovereign, and officers, and subjects, the organisation of a holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood. The kingdom thus came in power, and the love, and grace, and strength of Christ were in it. Nothing could withstand it—neither the old idolatries, nor Jewish unbelief—nor heathen philosophy—nor imperial Rome—nor riches—nor power—nor insensate barbarism—nor the fury of wild beasts. Jesus was visibly there in his gracious presence and the exercise of his divine power, making the weakest the strongest, and bringing to nought the things that were, by the things that were not. Doubtless this was a kingdom—yea, *the* kingdom that could not be moved, having not only a mighty collective force, but a vitality and energy so diffused through all its members, that each subject in him-

self was a host, invincible by all the powers of earth and hell. Verily those who were acting in the might of this unseen power, and living in the presence of its wonderful manifestations, could not doubt the glory of the future, because they realised that of the present. They could anticipate the final reversal of all the world's judgments, and its everlasting shame and abasement, because they felt themselves in Christ not its victims but its conquerors.

March onward in thy might, victorious host, for the shout of a King is heard in the midst of thee ! Who shall stay thy progress when thy Lord hath said to thee, " Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." " Go ye into all the world—for lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world." In thee shall be always the might of the conqueror. In thy deepest abasements thou shalt triumph, as well as when the shout of victory is heard in thy camp. In bearing the cross thou shalt conquer, more surely than when great armies shall be on thy side. In thy weakness thou art strongest. The triumph of the wicked is not only brief, but deceitful—its note of victory over the Lord's host is always the true signal of its defeat. When it has accomplished its highest aim in destroying thee, it has but succeeded in destroying itself. That malignant howl of victory on Calvary was the sealing of the nation's doom, and it was the type of many future triumphs and defeats. The nations and kingdoms that have persecuted and crushed thee have prostrated themselves, and become a hissing and by-word on the earth. The mark of the murderer was stamped on their brow, and their punishment was greater than they could bear. Who, then, is on the Lord's side—who ? If God be the Lord, follow him. If Baal be God, follow him.

You hear the shout of opposing armies—"the world or

God?" Each has a kingdom, and between them there is no alliance. You cannot espouse the cause of both. Do you see the power of this kingdom, and the bulwarks that defend it? do you see the Son of Man coming in it? are you under his banner? do you realise his presence? has his grace appeared to you, bringing salvation, and taught you to deny yourselves to all ungodliness and worldly lusts—to undertake this conflict with the world, and to defeat it? Then, so surely as you know Christ's presence now, and experience his gracious power, even so will you be found looking and waiting for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour. His present kingdom will be to you, as always, the pledge of the future, of the manifestation of the sons of God, and the glorious revelation of our risen and victorious king. This is the hope of the church, and must be till the end. This is her attitude, even a patient waiting for the coming of the Lord, when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. You are organised into a nation, and have righteous laws, and the gracious presence of your king even in this wilderness journey; but the eye of hope looks forward to the rest which remaineth—to the new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness reigns supreme, when the wickedness of the wicked shall come to an end, and when, in the glorious presence of the Lamb, shame shall be the portion of the proud, and all the world's decrees shall be reversed, and death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he will dwell with them and wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.



## § II. THE MOUNT OF VISION.

After the remarkable conference between Jesus and the disciples at Cæsarea Philippi, an interval of six days occur before we find any farther notice of them. We know not how these days were occupied, for regarding them we have no information. Possibly, and probably, they were spent by them in converse on the same theme, regarding which the disciples had proved that they so much needed instruction. That of which they had been speaking was a theme fruitful enough for many days' converse, mysterious enough to the disciples to need the most painstaking teaching on the part of Jesus, in order to lighten up for them that season of great darkness and perplexity which intervened between the past and the coming glory of Jesus. They were very slow of heart to understand and believe it. They had for the first time come within sight of the cross, and were shocked by and shrunk from it. At first it proved to them, as it did to the nation at large, a stumbling-block, as afterwards to the Greeks it was foolishness. Yet it was most necessary they should take it up and bear it—that they should bear Christ's cross and their own—it was necessary they should know him in the fellowship of his sufferings, as well as in the power of his resurrection. It was only by their receiving the cross, that the kingdom could become to them intelligible and precious. The resurrection, the Christian life, the future immortality, had no true definite meaning apart from it. Hence we see that though Jesus had spoken to them of his resurrection as well as of his death, they took no notice of that comforting fact. It was as if the word had been unspoken. They understood not as yet how death itself must

be conquered in order to the possession of that life which Jesus bought for them. It is probable, therefore, that these six intervening days—or, as Luke says, adopting the Jewish mode of reckoning, “about eight days,” were occupied with earnest converse on this theme. This is the more probable, because, when the scene again discloses Jesus and the disciples to us, we find them still occupied with the same subjects—the death and the kingdom—the cross and the crown—the humiliation and the glory.

Meantime we are not informed whether they had changed the locality to which they had betaken themselves. Their previous conference had been in the region of Cæsarea Philippi. The locality of the transfiguration is not indicated. The probabilities certainly are in favour of its having taken place in the same region, more especially as that was a mountainous region, for the roots of the mighty Hermon descend down into it. Tradition, however, has assigned to the transfiguration a different locality, and has fixed on Mount Tabor in Galilee as the scene of this wonderful spectacle, without any real or apparent reason indeed, unless it may be that Tabor is the highest mountain in Galilee. There are evident enough reasons why the locality of this remarkable event should not have been recorded—reasons which we shall find abundantly manifested in the manifold abuses to which even a conjectural knowledge of sacred places has given rise. Hence we find that the precise localities of all the more remarkable events in the life of Jesus are not indicated. The scenes of his birth, of his baptism, of the temptation, of the crucifixion, are, as in the present instance, undefined, and in fact unknown. For the stable at Bethlehem—the Jordan—the wilderness of Judea—Calvary, are all descriptions so indefinite as to render it impossible to identify the precise spot in which Jesus was born, or in

which he was consecrated to his work—or was tempted—or died—or was buried.

Where the transfiguration took place, it is not material for us to know. The fact itself is a very marvellous and instructive one, and designed to be such to the first disciples and to us. It is recorded by the three evangelists, as will be seen on a comparison of their respective records, almost in the same terms. There is wanting here, even the ordinary variety which we might expect to find in the narratives of three independent witnesses. The reason of this sameness lies doubtless in the marvellous nature of the fact itself. Here there is no room for the exercise of the different natural gifts and endowments which the inspiration of the Spirit does not supersede, but which, on the contrary, He uses. It is a scene lying far out of the region of common life, and of natural phenomena—most like those supernatural visions presented to the eye of ancient prophets, in recording which there was no room for variety of statement, because in the contemplation of them their natural faculties were overborne and powerless in the presence of that glory which was revealed.

Looking to this fact, some have argued that the occurrence was not a real one at all, but a vision presented to the minds of the three disciples during their sleep—that they only dreamed they were with Jesus on a high mountain, and saw him in radiant glory in converse with Moses and Elias—and that they only thus heard the words which were spoken. Such a dream as this, it might be argued, was not an unnatural result of their six days' previous converse with Jesus regarding the cross and the glory of the kingdom. Their minds would naturally be filled with manifold and perplexing thoughts about both, which might not unnaturally shape themselves into such forms in the dreams of the

night, as we here find exhibited in a continuous narrative. This conjecture has been sought to be confirmed by the fact which Luke alone records, that the three disciples were heavy with sleep, and saw this glorious vision when they suddenly awaked. It has been attempted to be still farther confirmed by the statement made regarding the appearance of Moses and Elias. How, it has been asked, could they as a matter of fact know that the persons they saw were Moses and Elias—how could they identify them? Were the whole scene a vision, such knowledge or belief was possible and likely, otherwise it is not.

To meet such conjectures as these, the question always occurs, are these credible historic narratives? If so, if the writers were honest, it is impossible to conclude that this was a vision. It is true, indeed, that Luke tells us the disciples had been asleep, but he as plainly tells us that they witnessed the scene when they were awake. The narrative has none of the characteristics of a prophetic vision. It is told us in a plain historic style, in such a way that had the writer not intended to deceive, the occurrence must have been a real one. As to the recognition of Moses and Elias, the difficulty is more apparent than real. Frequently their sources of information are not communicated to us by the evangelists, and we must be content with the fact that they knew the facts they relate. Evidently it was not impossible, in the present instance, for them to have been informed as to who Moses and Elias were. There may have been something in their appearance and accompaniments such as to render their personality unmistakeable, or the disciples may have gathered the fact from the conversation between them and Jesus, or Jesus may himself have afterwards informed them who these bright visitants were. It is sufficient for us that they did know them, and have declared their knowledge.

Having thus briefly disposed of these preliminary considerations, let us now look to the meaning of this wonderful visitation, as manifested more or less distinctly in the facts here recorded.

And, in the first place, and by way of general introduction, I observe that it is here and thus that Jesus is installed into his royal office. This, at least, is one grand object of this glorious manifestation, as we cannot fail to perceive from the voice which was heard out of the bright cloud, "this is my beloved Son, hear ye him." Jesus here appears in his royal investiture—his face is shining as the sun, and his raiment is white as light. Here he is set as king upon his holy hill of Zion. Jehovah declares his decree and says, "Thou art my Son, ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession." Hear ye him, his voice is a law to the church, her only law, as he is her only lord. He is one, not to be loved only, but obeyed. The word which he speaks *that* thou shalt do.

There could be no doubt, then, of the coming of the kingdom, and of its coming with power. Jesus had been laying its foundations in that confession of Peter, and had promised its speedy advent with power, however adverse its existing circumstances might seem. And now the disciples see him arrayed in glorious majesty, as it were already entering into the possession of his supreme authority, and assuming his royal state.

"Hear him." This is the essential characteristic of the kingdom, the unfailing test of a true and faithful church. "My kingdom," said he afterwards, "is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence. Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I



into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." His kingdom is not a visible temporal monarchy, which is upheld and strengthened by external constraints. Its subjects are made willing in the day of the Lord's power. They hear his voice and follow him. The constraint under which they act, is the constraint of love. They follow him, because in his voice they recognize the truth. This kingdom, then, was to establish and extend itself simply by the proclamation of the truth, and every one yielding to that truth would become in this way a subject of the kingdom. It would thus permeate through all the earth, and enlist its soldiers within every state, and become universal, and still preserve its unity.

"Hear ye him," this is the motto, the defence, the true token of the kingdom. Every obedient hearer thus becomes a true subject—those who do not are aliens and enemies. Hear ye him—listen not to your fears—your suggestions of worldly wisdom—hear not the priest, or the scribe, or the ruler. The truth is only to be found in hearing him. This is the kingdom and the power. It is invincible because he must reign till all his enemies have been made his footstool. And this only is *the* kingdom, the most perfect, compact, and uniform of all kingdoms. Obedience to earthly rulers may be external only. Here obedience is of the heart and mind, and of the whole heart and mind—an unreserved, undivided, and universal obedience. To hear another than him is treason and rebellion. This Lord, in his attractive majesty, can have no rival in the hearts of those who know him as he is.

And now, by anticipation as it were, Jesus is manifested in his radiant glory, to confirm these men in the truth of their previous confession. They had dared to own him as

the Christ, the Son of the living God, when they only saw him clothed in humility. They now hear him proclaimed as such from the midst of that overshadowing cloud, and have seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Here, then, was the prophet, like unto Moses, manifested at last, and as Moses had said, him they were to hear in all things whatsoever he should say unto them. Here they could recognize the Lord, as their judge, and lawgiver, and king. And as this similitude had been predicted between the lawgiver of the kingdom that had been and was soon to be taken away, and the lawgiver whose voice alone was to be heard in the kingdom that was now henceforth to be, in taking away the first and establishing the second, to use the words of Paul, there was an analogy of circumstances fitted to recal and to impress the comparison. For when Moses was formally installed as the lawgiver, he also went up to a mountain, accompanied by three attendants—Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu—and received there the law, and was also gloriously transfigured, in his intimate converse with heavenly things, and in the dignity of the office to which he had been elevated, and the children of Israel could not behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away. So Christ here ascends a mountain with the chosen three, and is seen clothed with light as with a garment, and is formally installed as the spiritual lawgiver. This kingdom, then, has already a beginning. It has a ruler and a law and subjects. That which he speaks is henceforth to be to them law. These disciples are no longer merely friends and companions, who might, if they choose, turn upon and reprove him as a brother. They are subjects of the most penetrating and absolute of all monarchies, and yet not the less brethren because they are subjects, but rather all the

more, because that word of his penetrated into their hearts, and they were then the freest and most loving when they became the most obedient.

But again, in the second place, if this scene had a significance to the disciples at once to subdue and to sustain and encourage them, it had also a no less significant application to Jesus himself. He too needed to be sustained, strengthened, and encouraged, to have the joy set before him in the strength of which he was to endure the cross. In considering his glory, let us not forget his manhood and its weakness. He was subject to fears, depressions, and anxieties. The disciples needed this manifestation to confirm and establish their faith. Jesus needed it to sustain him in the near and certain prospect of that terrible baptism of suffering which evoked from him strong crying and tears, to him who was able to save him from death. At his baptism, when he publicly entered on his life of propitiation, and identified himself with the people he came to save, he received this divine consolation and strength. The heavens were then opened, and the same voice was heard proclaiming his Sonship, and the Spirit descended and rested upon him. In the temptation in the wilderness, and in his agony in the garden, he also received support under the oppressive weight of those burdens which he had set himself to bear. And now also, when the time was drawing near when he should be offered, and when the shadow of death began to darken his onward path, there was thrown across it this heavenly radiance, and he was encircled for a brief time with that glory which was his destined inheritance.

And shall we not seek to enter into both these states of mind, and realize them both, from his bloody cross contemplating that radiant glory, and from his present and everlasting joy looking back upon the scene of Calvary, that we

may know both our sin and our salvation, that we may be able patiently to endure present discipline in the view of future glory, and in all stages of our progress seek to know Christ in the fellowship of his sufferings and in the power of his resurrection. Through his sufferings he became the Captain of our Salvation. By them he was perfected—perfected in this character and capacity, and having offered the one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, henceforth expecting till all his enemies be made, his footstool. To us who believe, as to him, belongs substantially the same history,—a crucifixion and a glorious rest. And amid the protracted and painful conflict with death and hell, we also have the promise and the realization of divine strength, and from the dark valley we are permitted to look with expectant joy to the glory which has shone from above, and to anticipate the time here prefigured in the history of the kingdom of God, when the risen saints shall dwell around the Saviour. And for the joy that is thus set before us, let us also learn, like Jesus, and in his grace, to endure the cross, despising its shame, considering always him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we should be weary and faint in our minds.

### § III. PREPARATIONS FOR THE SCENE.

1. At this as at other eventful periods of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, we find him engaged in prayer. He has recourse to this instrument and occupation alike in the seasons of his distress as in those of profound and holy joy, and on the eve of every great purpose which he executes. Counting it as his meat to do the will of his Father, he

assures himself by prayer of the reality of that will or purpose which he designs to accomplish, and by prayer brings his soul into a more glad and blessed harmony with that will. His Father throughout is made his counsellor and guide, and most confidential friend, to whom he unfolds all his difficulties and perplexities—into whose ear he pours the utterance of his distresses—and to whom he commits the burdens which were oppressing his laden spirit. Everywhere, and in all his labours, he seeks God and finds him, consults and leans upon him, and experiences in this blissful exercise a renovation of joy and strength. He goes in weakness to the throne of grace, and comes forth armed with the power of the omnipotent, reflecting, in his soul at least, the radiance of the sanctuary, and manifesting himself in word and act as the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. At this time we know that he had much trouble to bring and to unfold before his gracious and ever-loving Father. The prospect of his sufferings were pressing upon his spirit—sufferings the awful extent and severity of which he alone knew, and already it had become apparent that he must bear them alone, without any human sympathy. For his spirit had been vexed with the presumptuous ignorance and shrinking horror of these his chosen disciples. These spiritual evils in them were ever a sore grief to him—their unapprehensiveness, their unbelief, their self righteousness, their inconstancy, their cowardice, their selfishness, were ever hindering the outflowing of his love, and rendering him more deeply a sufferer. At this time he had a cause to bring before his Father. He needs refreshment and strength, and goes apart to a mountain with the chosen three to seek them. To him it is a very sacred season. Out of the depths he cries to Him from whom, to the distressed, all help and



light come. His human soul needs this stay of prayer. Tossed as it is by fast coming woe, and by the contradiction of sinners against himself—and these sinners, too, his own disciples, his closest earthly friends—he enters into that undisturbed calm and haven of rest which he finds beside the throne of God. And even while he prays he is lifted up—he enters into the radiant glory which faith contemplates, and anticipates heaven upon the earth—and the fashion of his countenance is changed—the vesture of his humility is transformed into one of glory—and he is exhibited as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The joy is not only set before him, but for a brief time it is realised, and the cross becomes therefore endurable. He not only predicts the advent of his kingdom, but is invested with its royal insignia, and already he appears in his own glory and in his Father's. He is proclaimed king, and obedience is claimed for him as one who has been already enthroned.

This glorious transformation takes place while he is praying. It is a type and an example. This scene has its three witnesses, who look on with adoring wonder, as they behold this manifestation of the elevating and transforming power of prayer. It has a lesson for them, as for Jesus himself. He is lifted up in this exercise, changed and glorified. They are invited not only to look on in wonder, but to act in like manner. In Jesus they too have a heavenly Father, and to them it is given to become the sons of God. They also have this heavenly counsellor and guide, who though unseen is ever present. They have access to the same gracious throne, and in company with this their elder brother and Saviour, there to unbosom all their griefs and trials, and to ask counsel and strength for every emergency. Nor will their cry out of the depths be

unheard. Even while they pray they shall experience this glorious transformation, and shall pass beyond the storms of time into the blessed calm of eternity, and in having access to the throne as priests, they will find that they have also become kings.

Nor was this exclusively the privilege and duty of these chosen three. Throughout all time the truth which is here exemplified holds good. Such is the faithfulness of God, and such therefore the gracious power of prayer. The true disciple of Jesus ascends with him this holy mount of ordinances, a high mountain which brings him near the very gate of heaven, and while he prays he passes out of the thick darkness into light inaccessible—is raised out of the depths of his severe conflict into the serene calm of assured faith; and while no outward visible change takes place on his countenance and raiment, he feels that there is to him a transformation not less real and blessed—that in this sacred converse with the Highest he has passed from the region of doubt and fear into that of holy confidence—and that now refreshed, and strengthened, and armed with heavenly panoply, and in sight of the glory to be revealed, he also can bear the cross, and in it triumph over his enemies. He has already become a king in the mastery over his troubles which he has achieved, and will wear the conqueror's crown. This for us is the ark of refuge—the place of rest—the secret of our strength. He who prays becomes invincible, and rides in safety amid those surging billows, which shall not overwhelm his soul. Most blessed privilege, did we but know how to use it! Oh for the outpouring of the Spirit of grace and of supplication, and then would the church assume a new attitude in the presence of her foes—then her bondage would be turned back, and she would appear clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an

army with banners ! We, the very humblest of us, through the gifts which prayer brings, and the transformation its effects, may become stronger than the mightiest, and the glory of the Lord will arise upon us. Alas, how much we need this transformation ! And yet do we not seem to fear that it should be effected, lest we should be too far separated from the world, which we long after ; and thus we continue to wear our filthy rags, instead of the beautiful garment of salvation.

2. It may be profitable to notice the fact of the selection of three disciples to be witnesses of the transfiguration, and to ascertain, if possible, the lesson which it conveys. It is by no means difficult to find a reason for the fact. We have simply to bear in mind that the scene which they were to witness was one which it was at once necessary to see, and to keep concealed. It was necessary that there should be this revelation of the majesty and glory of Jesus for the comfort and instruction of the church in all coming time, and it was necessary for the purposes of Christ's mission of humiliation unto death that such a fact should not be prematurely discovered. Jesus gave these disciples a special charge that they should tell no man, till he should be risen again from the dead ; and in this case they seem to have seen the necessity of keeping this charge, for we are told that they kept it close and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen. Evidently, therefore, it was better that three rather than the twelve should be witnesses of a fact, which for a season was to be kept secret. Three were sufficient to attest the fact, and they were more likely not to discover it till the proper season came.

We are disposed, however, to look for a more latent meaning in this fact on the present occasion. When we

look at the connection in which the transfiguration stands to the confession of Peter at Cesarea Philippi, and the conversation which ensued—the declared purpose of Christ to build his church upon a rock, and to organize on the earth a kingdom of heaven—and at the prediction of the coming of that kingdom—we cannot help regarding this scene upon the mountain as throughout illustrative of the character and condition of that kingdom. In the separation of the three, then, from the body of the disciples, may we not presume, that there was a prefiguration of one singular characteristic of the state of that kingdom? It was to be a kingdom existing among the nations of the earth—distinct from them in its laws, in its method of administration, and in its objects, organized under separate rulers to whom was entrusted the custody of the keys. But besides, it was to be a kingdom not only existing within earthly kingdoms, but a kingdom also existing, so to speak, within itself—having an external organization embracing all its professed subjects, but also a boundary more or less narrow than that, within which was embraced only those who really were sons of God, and over whom Christ reigned in grace. Already the elements of this outward organization of the kingdom existed in the case of Jesus and the twelve, and already, also, this habitual condition of the visible church found a place in their history—the real boundary not being conterminous with the nominal and visible one. Of course it would be false to say that the three only were real disciples, and the other nine only nominally so. Nor is it necessary we should so read the lesson. It is sufficient that a separation and distinction were made, though here the boundaries between the actual and formal were not specifically marked out. It was never designed in the history of the church that the boundary should be so marked. In fact

this is always impossible. But yet we know that such a boundary exists. All are not Israel who are of Israel. The true spiritual kingdom lies within the formal kingdom. Being in the church is not necessarily to be a son of God and an heir of heaven. There was a Judas among the twelve. There are formal professors in every church—dead branches upon the living vine. There is no sacred enclosure which is not trodden by the profane. This lesson it is ever necessary to learn, to keep us watchful, sober, and humble. If treason in the church is possible, it behoves each of us to say, “Lord, is it I?” Am I of the invisible church, or merely of that which is outward and formal? How is it with me personally? For the right determination of this question must always be the result of self-scrutiny. Prove your own selves whether ye be in the faith. Are ye living stones in the temple which the Lord is building?

But there is another lesson which, with much greater confidence we would say, is taught by this selection of the three. This is not the only occasion on which they are thus separated from the rest. These three belonged evidently to a kind of inner circle among the disciples. They stood nearer to Jesus than the rest, and were admitted to peculiar privileges. They were not only the witnesses of his glory on the Mount, but of his agony in the garden,—of his lowest abasement, and of his highest elevation in the world. Not that in them Jesus revived in any sense the practice of heathen philosophy, and taught them esoteric doctrines, which he hid from the other disciples. Whatever at first he told them in secret, was ultimately proclaimed from the house-top. No prophecy is of any private interpretation, neither were any of them masters over the others. But while all of them were brethren of the same household, and all sharers in the same revelation of the gracious will of God,



to them it was given to have a closer intimacy with Jesus, and to be personal witnesses of what the rest did not see. And the effect of this specialty of treatment became abundantly manifest in the future history of the church. These three stand out most prominently in the early proclamation of the gospel, and in the performance of those miracles by which it was attested, and even to this day we reap the benefit of their higher privilege in those epistles which they, and they only, were inspired to write.

In all this we see a manifestation of what was to be the permanent condition of the church, namely, that while in the true church there was to be the same spirit, there would be diversities of gifts—that while all were brethren and citizens of that only true republic which exists on the earth, there would yet be differences among them, in virtue of which some would be greatly signalized above others, both in the measure of grace they possessed, and in the extent to which that grace would become available for the establishment and extension of the church. There would ever be some who, more than others, were admitted to a closer intimacy with the Lord, and endowed with a more penetrating insight, and unto whom the Lord would more fully unveil his glory.

Nor should we lose sight of the fact that the higher privileges of the three resulted in the greater immediate and permanent edification of the church. We are to regard the one as the cause of the other. And this principle of causation has not ceased. It is still he who gets nearest to the Lord, who labours in his service most abundantly and successfully. There is no evidence that Peter, James, and John were possessed of higher natural endowments than the rest of the twelve, but they saw the Lord's glory on the mount, and were with him in his agony, and so they became

in the church as sons of thunder, in the mighty power of divine love. And so it is always. The secret of strength and influence lies in this intimate divine fellowship. Those who see most of Christ are able to speak of him most powerfully and winningly.

3. Let us notice the fact that, while the marvellous change is taking place in the aspect of Jesus, the disciples are heavy with sleep. It is a remarkable coincidence that in the two instances in which these three are so separated and signalised, the same thing should have befallen. When they were present at the agony in the garden, we are told that they were sleeping for sorrow. It had been to them a night of much joy and grief, and under the weight of the gloomy thoughts that pressed upon them, their eyes became heavy with sleep. At this time also, the same cause seems to have operated in producing a like result. On both occasions Jesus prays and they sleep. On the latter occasion Jesus testifies regarding them that their spirit was willing but that their flesh was weak, and now the fact of their sleeping brought down upon them no reproof. Yet, wherever this gospel is read, there stands recorded, side by side, the fact of their exaltation to a higher privilege than others, and the fact of their falling asleep. Is there not a manifest use in such a record—in the occurrence of such a fact? The tendency of our nature always is to abuse our highest privileges, to claim them as the reward of higher merit, and to assume authority on account of having enjoyed them. To check this tendency, and to restrain the feeling of pride and of self-righteousness in these men, they are overtaken with sleep, on both the occasions on which Jesus admits them to closer intimacy with himself. He will have them and us to understand that such a privilege is of grace and not of merit, and to see that even in the

bestowal of his gift, we prove our unworthiness of it. Men are not partakers with Christ either in the agony of his sufferings or in the receiving of his glory. He is alone in both. He bears unaided his burden—he invites and calls forth unaided the manifestation of his Father's acceptance and approval.

So it is always in the history of the church. We find it so in the case of Paul, who, amid the glorious successes which attended his ministry and the manifestation of divine power and grace through him, lest he should be exalted above measure, had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. The disciples of Jesus need always so to be dealt with. If they have that which is fitted to elevate them, they must have also that which is fitted to abase their pride. The most honoured saints of God are those also who are most severely tried. Alongside the record of their triumphs there always stands the record of their weakness. When the transformation took place upon Jesus, and it seemed for a little as if already he was coming in glory to assume the throne of his kingdom, he shows that this access of glory was not absolutely dependent on the watchfulness and energy of men. The disciples were asleep when the fashion of his countenance was changed. And so it is always. When Jesus comes forth in manifest power, and displays the glory of his grace in the church, you can never say this has been brought about by the watchfulness, the prayer, the energy, of his disciples. Such seasons of refreshing and revival come upon them when they are, as it were, asleep—they come in unspeakable grace to suit the need and the requirements of the church—to fit her for present duty, or to fortify her for coming trial.

But though Christ does his work alone, agonizes alone, and triumphs without human aid, he does not, therefore,

encourage men to sleep. Doubtless on this occasion these disciples, during the whole previous week, had been deeply humbled and distressed, at their own presumption and unbelief, and at the gloomy prospect that was before them. They had been looking out for light and help, and to their worn out and weary spirits the light at length comes. Just as before on the sea of Galilee, when they had been rowing all night without progress, and when they were ready to give up in despair, Jesus came walking over the tempestuous billows. So now when they see their weakness and need to the utmost—when their spirits are heavy and overborne with grief, and they can see no promise of the dawn, through the darkness of that night of sorrow—Jesus prays, and the fashion of his countenance is changed, and they find themselves standing in the midst of that glory which shall yet in the end be more fully disclosed. Christ comes not in power to add to the strength of the church—he comes to the church's weakness and utmost need, and converts them into strength and riches. Let us, therefore, wait on the Lord, for he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Let us recognize our own and the church's need, and at the very time when our souls are saying, What shall we do?—in their straits and perplexity, at the time when even the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fail, deliverance will come. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.

## § IV. THE CONFERENCE IN GLÓRY.

This glorious manifestation of Jesus should be looked to always in connection with that which attended his baptism. When he appeared at the Jordan, and subjected himself to that ordinance, he formally undertook the work of redemption. He stood forth among men as the sin-bearer, not merely as a man made under the law to fulfil its requirements, but as assuming the burden of his people's transgressions. In that baptism he declared himself—if not personally, at least by substitution and imputation, a sinner, and liable to the sinner's doom. It was a heavy burden which he had assumed, and he needed and received strength to bear it. Then the voice of the Father's approval was heard from heaven, and he entered on his mission, anointed with the Spirit of promise. Thus equipped with heavenly armour, and having the joy set before him, he assumed the cross, and in meek patience daily bore it.

Now, again, he needs and receives strength—he is approaching the goal of his suffering—the agony of that affliction of soul and body which he had set himself to endure. The gloomy prospect begins more definitely to engage his mind, and his sorrow finds expression for itself in his confidential intercourse with his disciples. He does not receive the feeble support of their sympathy; but at this turning point of his history he looks for, and again receives that support which was infinitely more precious. The joy is again set before him, in the strength of which he is to bear his burden. He is now, as it were, consecrated, and set apart for suffering. But though he is to be a sufferer, he is not personally a sinner. Without the shedding



of blood, he personally has access within the veil, to dwell under the brightness of the shekinah.

Thus this wondrous scene is presented to the disciples. He who is doomed to die is not worthy of death, but of glory ineffable. In this manifestation it is revealed to them how he is at once well beloved and accursed. And that they might understand this mystery more perfectly, there appear two men who talk with Jesus. These men are Moses and Elias.

Let us attend, then, to the fact of this conference, and to what is implied in it. Of one of these men, we are told that he was translated to heaven in a chariot of fire. Of the other that, though he died, no man knew of his sepulchre, and that the Archangel Michael claimed his body. It is not irrational, then, to believe that these men had, body and soul, been taken to the place of blissful rest, and of unclouded glory—not, indeed, as anticipating the resurrection of Jesus, who became the first fruits of them that sleep—but as undergoing in the moment of death, and ere the separation between soul and body was complete, that glorious transformation which shall be the privilege of the living saints, when the time of the manifestation of the sons of God shall come. There was, when we thus regard their state, a possibility of their appearing as they did, for they had been re-invested with a glorified body, and were not like the rest of the glorified, existing as unclothed and invisible spirits.

These two, then, appeared in glory speaking with Jesus on the Mount. Why these? What need of this appearance? What did it indicate and prove? Moses had been the law-giver—Elias had been the restorer and purifier. Each had had a distinct function, and each had left the fulfilment of it imperfect. Moses, indeed, gave the law, and Elias

preached righteousness. But that law was broken, and the wickedness of Israel increased till they were rooted out of their inheritance. Now, again, we find them revisiting the earth for a brief moment, not indeed to resume their functions, but to talk with Jesus. It is a most friendly conference they hold. The three meet in one, in mutual harmony. Is this not a distinct proclamation that here, in this work which Jesus had set himself to do, and in his person, the law would receive its perfect fulfilment, and that righteousness would again reign on the earth—that Jesus was at once to fulfil the law and to restore its power over the souls of men.

What Jesus was now doing on the earth was not unknown in the heavenly places. The angels desired to look into these things, and if they did so, surely not less the glorified children of men, who had seen the day of Christ afar off and rejoiced in it, and by faith had entered into the promised rest. And among these heavenly enquirers and onlookers the most deeply interested must have been Moses and Elias. We find that the angels hovered around the path of Jesus, observed his progress, and strengthened his fainting spirit. And Moses and Elias now also come forth from the inaccessible glory to enquire, to wonder, and to speak of these things—to learn more perfectly this mystery of the incarnation, what is implied in it, and how it is to work out its blessed results.

And these three distracted and erring disciples, too, look on and listen and try to apprehend alike the scene and the conversation. Jesus had been with them founding a new church, with new institutions and terms of fellowship, and by that fact had seemed to separate them from the faith and hope of their fathers. They were told that the church which they had been owning as the true one which the Lord

was to visit and bless, would not only reject Christ but put him to death. In cleaving to Christ they felt that they must be separated from that Jewish church. But was not it the representative of Abraham, of Moses, and of the prophets? Such a fact was fitted to fill them with wonder and perplexity. Here was now the solution of the mystery. Here on this Mount they see Moses himself not rejecting Jesus, but doing him reverence. These scribes and priests and elders, then, must misrepresent Moses, and that church of theirs must have become a synagogue of Satan. Jesus is here visibly in harmony with Moses; it is these Jews who have broken the harmony. This church, then, which is to be built on the living confessors of Jesus, shall not be a separate church, but shall be one with that of the Fathers and Confessors of old—the church of Abraham, and of Moses, and of Elias.

Was that church a perfect one in Moses and Elias? Was it not rather a church of prophecy and of promise—the shadow of good things to come, and not the substance of the things themselves—a church all whose offices and institutions pointed to something else—whose priesthood was imperfect, whose sacrifices could not purge the conscience? The law could make nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did. Here Moses reappears to behold the completion of his work—the fulfilment of that which he set forth in type and symbolic institution. He is here to proclaim his harmony with Christ—the unity of the faith and of the church—to rejoice in the fact that what was perfect was now come, and what was imperfect done away. Here was the embodiment of the law of which he was the mediator—the law which was to receive in Christ a double fulfilment—by realising the substance of that which was typified, and *that*, by the presentation of a sacrifice in

which mercy and truth met together, and by the shedding of that blood which cleanseth from all sin. Here was the true priest and the true propitiation, by whom the perfect righteousness which the law reflected and embodied in words would be manifested in living action.

If not to those disciples, at least to us now looking back upon the scene, the appearance of Moses on the Mount of transfiguration, in conference with Jesus, proclaimed all this truth. It was a full and gracious attestation of the whole purpose and results of Christ's mission. In the light of that glory the veil had been already taken away, or they had passed through it, and the way of access into the holiest was manifested. The doctrine of mediation was now made thoroughly clear, which had of old been dimly prefigured. Moses and Christ meet and attest the harmony of the divine dispensations of grace, and while Moses is done away in Christ, he is also glorified by him, and his ministration becomes the vestibule of the Christian temple.

Nor was the appearance of Elias there less appropriate and significant. He was peculiarly the restorer and reformer of the church. Appearing in a corrupt age, it was his function, by terrible chastisements, and by the word of his testimony, to turn the hearts of men to the wisdom and obedience of the just. It was indeed the practical object and aim of all the divine revelations and dispensations, to reproduce the word of God in the actual life of men—thus to shew the glory of God, that men might look into it, and be changed into the same image. All revelation fails of its direct purpose and aim except in so far as it is received as seed into the heart, and reproduces itself in abundant fruitfulness. Elias had come on this special mission, and now he re-appears on the Mount also in conference with Jesus. Was there the same harmony between his mission and that

of Jesus as obtained between that of Moses and Christ? Doubtless there was. He, too, as well as Moses, had been the minister of an imperfect dispensation, and scarcely arrested for a moment the iniquity which was coming in like a flood. But what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. Here was a deliverer not only from the curse, but from the body of sin and death, he who, dwelling in his people by faith, and enabling them to apprehend the love of God, would fill them with his own fulness. In them the old man is crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that they should not henceforth serve sin. Being thus made free from sin, they become servants to God, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. In him therefore also the mission of Elias is to be accomplished, by terrible chastisements it might be, but yet unto godliness. There is a crucifixion for them as there was for Christ. In his crucifixion the law of Moses is fulfilled—in theirs the mission of Elias.

This conference illustrates and explains all that Jesus is to accomplish by his own sufferings and theirs. The Divine visitations to the earth are not to be always in vain. Here is the fruit and issue of all that God had foretold and promised—the harmony of all his actings and dispensations—the accomplishment of them all both in Christ and in them. Henceforth for the world there is a new history and a new hope. The harmony produced in, and proclaimed from heaven, shall find its development and counterpart on the earth, and its divided and warring nations shall at last become one—a happy family, dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty—and the promise shall be verified, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, the



young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot."

Let us consider still farther the subject-matter of their conference. They spake of the decease which Jesus should accomplish at Jerusalem. This was the grand theme which engaged their thoughts as they dwelt in that glory. It was a topic suited to the time. In it indeed was to be found an explanation of this wonderful appearance. That decease—that shameful death, of which the disciples had been afraid to think, as involving the destruction of all their hopes—is a theme for converse within the gates of heaven itself. The cross begins already to radiate its glory. It is spoken of as a decease—a death not endured because the violence and injustice of man so willed it—not forced upon Jesus reluctantly—as a thing from which he could not escape—as if cruelty and unbelief were to obtain a final victory over all that is lovely and pure. They speak of it as a decease to be accomplished—a part of Christ's own work—the crowning and most glorious fact of his history—a thing which he would himself accomplish—that he had set himself to bear—the voluntary giving away of his life as a ransom for many.

It is a theme to be transferred from that mountain top to a higher region still, which would be the subject of ceaseless adoration and praise, the most glorious fact in the revelation of the Godhead, not only to man, but to the whole intelligent universe. This death is not to be merely the termination of life, but the accomplishment of all God's gracious designs and promises to men, in which every thing is to meet its fulfilment, by which the glory of God is revealed—the law magnified—sinners saved—and the world delivered from its curse. Moses and Elias understand and are not ashamed of the cross—they desire to look into and comprehend it more perfectly, and invite these three disci-

ples and us to the same holy meditation. By it the world is to be crucified to the saints and they to the world, and thus the mission of Elias is to be accomplished. By that offering he is to perfect for ever all them that are sanctified, and so the law of Moses is to be superseded, because gloriously fulfilled. It is the basis of our hope, and the theme of our rejoicing. From that smitten rock flow the waters of eternal life. In that blood the stain of all sin is washed away. Because of it, to them who believe there is no more curse, no more condemnation.

We cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that this scene of the transfiguration, and the conversation which accompanied it, did not thus immediately impress itself upon the minds of those who witnessed it. They were yet slow of heart to believe. It was to them a mystery, however clear its purpose and object may be to us. Nor can we help wondering at the slowness of their apprehension, and at the difficulty they found in believing the fact of Christ's death, and in apprehending the gracious purpose which lay beneath it. Doubtless it arose from their deep-rooted feeling of self-righteousness. They did not perceive in themselves its necessity, and could not rise to the apprehension of its nature. To them it could never become, as often since it has been, a subject of speculation and of doctrine merely. It was throughout a personal and practical matter, not to be reasoned about as true or false under some scheme or system, but apprehensible only when they could personally embrace the great truth which it proclaimed. And when we consider this, it should not appear to us so surprising that such darkness was upon their minds regarding it, for have we not had abundant experience of the same slowness of heart to believe and understand? We have been walking longer in company with Jesus than they, hearing his words,

and taking note of his wonderful works. To how many of us has this death of his become a welcome and realised truth—not a fact in history merely, but a thing which concerns us most nearly and personally? To these disciples Christ's death necessarily was the destruction of all hope, or it was a sure and everlasting foundation. What is it to us? or rather, what do we perceive it to be to us? Is it more than the narrative of any other martyrdom? If the world has yet power over us—if we are living for it, and are insensible to that reckoning which awaits us in eternity—if the spirit of self-righteousness so possess us that we have never been constrained to cry, What shall we do?—if we have never felt ourselves under condemnation, and deserving of it—we are yet in darkness, and to us this death presents no other aspect than it did at first to these men. It is a most sorrowful, tragical event, and that is all. It is not yet encompassed to us by a heavenly radiance, and for us it has accomplished nothing. Yet it is most needful that we should look at it in this heavenly light—that we should consider the immense interests which are dependent upon it—the concern with which God, and the angels, and the glorified saints look on it—and understand that but for this death, and our interest in it, the blackness of darkness must rest upon us for ever. “For there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall consume the adversary.” We also are rejecters of Christ, and become his crucifiers, unless this death have become to us the most glorious fact in the universe—the foundation of our hope, and the death of our sin.

## § V. PETER'S PROPOSAL.

In the progress of our exposition, we come now to the consideration of Peter's proposal. "He saith unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here ; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He is ever the same impulsive man. We might have thought that the rebuke he had so recently received would have constrained him, for a season at least, to hold his peace. But this, to him, seems impossible. Whatever suggests itself to him must find expression. We cannot help admiring this perfect openness and simplicity of character. We are sure always to know what is passing in his mind. Nor is it this alone which urges him forward. He is a man thoroughly practical. It is not enough for him to look on, and meditate, and adore. What he sees he must make proof of—he must experiment upon. He cannot permit himself to stand outside as an onlooker, but must get into the very heart of the business. It is the actual working of a thing which alone has any great interest for him. He cannot rightly understand it till he sets himself to do it. So was it with him on the stormy sea of Galilee. He could not be satisfied with seeing Jesus walking there, but he must try it himself. So is it now in widely different circumstances. He is not content to look on and wonder at the glorious scene presented to his view. He must have a hand in it. He must be employed somehow about it. He would like to get some experience of a mode of life so startlingly new. One cannot help admiring and loving such a character, ever so prompt and ready, entering so fully and heartily into everything he does, and adapting himself so speedily to every change of scene and circumstance. This disposition, if it

led him into some errors, earned for him also many distinctions. It characterised his whole course of action, and marks him out distinctively from all the other disciples. It is a kind of intense human sympathy. He must get into close contact with the men in whose society he happens to be, by word or by deed. He will speak with them or work with them. He gets into the very position of those around him, enters into their heart, and feelings, and objects, and identifies himself with them. We may find here the secret of the two grand errors of his life—his reproof of Jesus and his denial of him. It seemed to him, from this ardour and intense sympathy of his nature, as if, when Jesus spoke of dying, he also must die with him, as afterwards he boldly and honestly declared his resolution to do. He had, at the moment, no idea of a life apart from Jesus, and therefore his alarm and his rash reproof. It was given under the belief that they were to share a common fate. Again, this feeling which made him so strong at other times, proved his weakness in the high priest's hall. This ardent, sympathetic man could not well stand alone. He must be thoroughly with those around him ; and accordingly, there, amid profane mockers, he denied Jesus with oaths and curses.

At the present time, with his wonted ardour and promptitude, he enters into the scene before him. For a brief period after he had awaked, the awful and majestic scene appears to have subdued him to silence. But soon there seems to him to come a time for his intervention. Luke tells us that he spoke when Moses and Elias were departing from Jesus. This scene was apparently about to dissolve, and in a moment he overcomes his terror and speaks. He has a proposal to make, which it seems to him will suit the occasion. He is ready practically to set about the doing of it, but then he feels that he cannot do it without a warrant. He is again



here, as he was on the sea of Galilee, manifestly within the region of the supernatural. In affairs belonging to this world, even in matters of life and death, he waits no warrant, and errs in his haste. But here he must have a word of Jesus to authorise him. He cannot act without permission. He has been carried into an unknown and visibly glorious land, in which he is yet a stranger, and he will not move a step without a warrant. Even his strong practical turn of mind compels him to wait for this. He does not know whether the expedients which are suited to another and homelier region may serve the purpose here. He wishes indeed to try, but he will not attempt it unless he is permitted.

How many errors of doctrine, and especially of worship, might have been spared to the church, if all men had been willing to follow so goodly an example! Passing into this region of faith and of divine intercourse, it has seemed to men that there were many good expedients which they could adopt for the purpose either of prolonging, or of more thoroughly realising, the scene which has been presented to their contemplation. Taken to the mount of ordinances, where Jesus has promised to manifest himself, and where so often he has shown his glory to his waiting and believing people, there have been those who, like Peter, thought that their position would be improved by the erection of tabernacles—by adding some ceremonial to their worship, by which they have thought that the feelings proper to it would be more largely called forth, and better sustained, but who have not waited, alas! the permission and authority of the Lord to introduce them. Such a course of action must ever be mischievous and corrupting. Our worship may thereby be rendered more sensuous, but never more spiritual. Whatever we do here, must be prefaced by the reverential “Lord,

if thou wilt." The world's wisdom and practical expedients are here out of place. A tabernacle is but a brief, earthly home. The simple majesty of nature is what best befits the august presence of the glorious one. The handiwork of men is here only incongruous and evil. Let us be satisfied that he who knows the heart, and how to reach it, is best able to direct us how to worship him ; and that here we must suggest nothing, propose nothing, but with his express sanction and warrant.

There seems to us to be something perplexing, and almost contradictory, in the account which is given us of what Peter said on this occasion, and of the feeling which prompted him to say it. Luke tells us that he wist not what he said. Mark repeats the same statement, but adds to it, as a reason for this wandering in his speech, that they were sore afraid. It is, therefore, in this state of awful fear that Peter speaks, and yet his words are far from indicating such a state of mind. Do they not seem to indicate the reverse ? " Lord, it is good for us to be here ; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." His words are those of joy and confidence, expressive of a familiar, home-like feeling. Amid the glory of the scene, he seems, indeed, to have forgot his feeling of entire brotherhood with Jesus and his shining visitors. Accordingly he does not propose to erect a tent for himself, and James, and John. He purposes evidently only to wait, as it were, in the outer court of that august temple, so radiant with the glory of God.

But all this seems scarcely in harmony with the fact that he was sore afraid. In such a state of mind it is not easy to conceive how he should have said, it is good for us to be here. There can be little doubt that at this time, as once at least before, he was agitated by very conflicting emotions, labour-

ing under an overwhelming sense of awe and reverential fear, and yet feeling how blessed it was to be near Jesus in his glory. The first time he is presented to us on the Sea of Galilee we find in him a similar conflict of contending emotions—his soul never more ardently cleaving to Jesus than when he cried, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. He then felt his utter unworthiness, and yet ventured to hope in the mercy of Christ. His soul was, as it were, in the agony of the new birth, tossed, and straitened, and clouded by feelings the most contradictory. He feels that he is unworthy to dwell in God's presence, and yet that there is no life or safety for him elsewhere. He is driven from God by his own self-abhorrence; and yet drawn to God by his desperate need. On the present occasion also he fears, and yet is confident. He is consciously unworthy, and yet glad that Jesus has made him the witness of such a scene. The glory is so bright that he is afraid, and yet it is so lovely that he desires to dwell in it. He feels that it is a good thing that Christ should be so manifested to him, and yet he is terribly afraid of his majesty.

Such conflicting feelings as these are familiar to the consciousness of believers. They are ready in one breath to say to God, Depart, and come,—conceal thy glory, and yet manifest it to us. In the presence of that glory they feel as if the billows of divine anger must overwhelm them, and they are sore afraid—their souls are agitated and tossed, as it were, on an angry sea, and they are rent in twain. They plead for darkness and oblivion, and yet long for the light, feeling that they must come to God, and yet equally feeling that in their nakedness they must hide from his presence. Depart from me, O Lord, for thy presence has slain me. I am at thy feet as one dead—thou needest not pronounce the sentence of death. I feel the curse in all the faculties

of my agonised soul. And yet depart not, it is good for me to be here—let me dwell near thee and behold thy glory.

It is under this conflict of feeling that Peter now speaks—he is glad and yet sore afraid. He desires at once to realise the blessedness and rest of the kingdom, and yet is conscious in his shrinking timid soul of his utter unworthiness to dwell in the radiance of that glory. In his fear he knows not what he says. That rest is so good that I must wish it to be perpetual. This would be certainly a blessed home—to dwell in such society, in such light; but then, alas! what a gulf lies between me and it. There cannot be a tabernacle there for me. Through what processes must I pass ere I sit down there glorified like these men! Such an issue—such an ending—a position so elevated, is good—nothing can be conceived better—but what must I become in order to occupy it! His mind wanders, tossed between these two extremes, on the great gulf of uncertainty and darkness which lies between him and that glorious rest. His proposal is without an expressed or realised object—his wishes and his conscious demerits are so much in conflict.

Such an experience could never afterwards be without use to him; nor is it unimportant that we, looking back upon it, should endeavour to turn it to the same account. Who is there that, after the toil and manifold woes of this life, would not wish to be set down within the gates of heaven—the home of blissful rest? Who, in imagination, would not say, It is good for us to be here!—here let us erect our tabernacle and dwell in peace and security for ever? But consider well what lies between you and that rest. Could you feel at home in the radiance of that light, and behold the face of the glorified Son of Man? Is your heart in accordance with such a scene, and such companionships?

Would it be a heaven and home to you? Have you got so entirely quit of all your enmity to God, and your love to the world, as to be meet for that inheritance of the saints? You must evidently be ready for it before you can enter there, and have a tabernacle in the holy place. Oh! what great preparation is yet needed—what putting off of the old man—what crucifixion of the flesh—what exercise of the spiritual affections.

Peter had revolted at the idea of the death of Jesus. He would understand it better after this scene. Must he not die also in order to dwell in that glory? How was the transformation to be effected, of which, in his sore fear, he so deeply felt the need? Could he prepare himself for this society? How was he to meet Moses, the lawgiver, and Elias, the terrible avenger of idolatry? If he is to have a tent in that elysium, it must evidently be through a fulfilled law, and a renewed nature purged from its idolatry. It was in that death of Christ, which he so much abhorred to think of, that he was to find them both—a perfect righteousness, and a conscience purged from dead works.

And it is here, too, that we must seek and find them. It is in vain to pray with Balaam, Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be his. This death cannot be ours, unless we are really righteous. The distance between us and heaven must be trodden by us. The old nature must be put off, and the new nature assumed. But this preparation is not impossible—that wide gulf has been bridged over. At the cross we find everything we need. Here, then, let me ever seek to have my need supplied. Salvation is God's gift; it is not my work.



## § VI THE CLOUD AND THE HEAVENLY VOICE.

There was an over-shadowing cloud resting on that glorious scene. It was a bright cloud, and yet it shadowed the disciples. While Peter was yet speaking, Jesus and the two glorified ones entered into it. This was their tabernacle, and they needed not that of Peter. The sanctuary within which they were enclosed was a tabernacle woven of the beams of divine glory. Jesus and they become invisible in that intense light, which is equivalent to darkness. The voice which is heard in it proclaims what the cloud is. It is the *Schekinah* restored—the symbol of the divine presence—the cloud into which Moses entered of old on Mount Sinai—the cloud which also rested on the tabernacle and on the temple, and which was both bright and dark. It is a period of solemn expectation—the harmonious closing of such a scene. By such a symbol God had of old revealed his law—by it he had proclaimed his perpetual presence among his people—by it he was known as the covenant God of Israel. For ages it had been withdrawn, but now the divine Father again condescends to visit and to bless his people. In that blessed harmony of Jesus with Moses and Elias, his long controversy with them is at an end. He is now in Christ their covenant-God—sets his seal on this work which Jesus had engaged to perform—and proclaims himself well-pleased. Surely, then, the acceptable year of the Lord hath come, and it is the time for the ransomed to rejoice. This is a more blessed advent than the former had been, for then there was blackness, and darkness, and a tempest, and manifold tokens of indignation and vengeance. These augured a dispensation of mingled mercy and judgment, embodying the hope of deliverance under a system of

law and of bondage. But now the cloud descends, without the sound of trumpet or an earthquake—it comes noiselessly as the sweet light of morning. The Son of Righteousness has arisen with healing in his wings. Now God comes in unmingled mercy and love. He so comes because the broken covenant has been repaired, and his law magnified, and his gracious purpose sealed. All this is already as good as done. He knows that it will be done. And the mediator of the new and better covenant enters into that bright cloud, and is for a brief moment again in the embrace of the Father.

Most blessed and happy re-union, blessed for the oppressed and heavy-laden soul of the man Christ Jesus—a re-union in which he receives new joy, and consequently new strength to finish his course! Most blessed harmony of heaven and earth, when Jehovah is well pleased for his righteousness sake, in the anticipated triumph of Jesus Christ! Blessed, also, to heavy-laden souls groaning under the burden of sin, and waiting earnestly for deliverance—because it proclaims a God already reconciled, and condescending again to dwell with men on earth. The thunders of an outraged and violated law are no more heard, and it is only the voice of a Father which is heard issuing from that bright cloud, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”—thrice beloved for his love to men, and because he hath become their salvation. This was the Father’s gracious purpose—a purpose now on the eve of its accomplishment. And to us, as to these three disciples, he is saying again, Stand still and see the salvation of God. Already, even in the presence of a proud and boastful foe, and with the Red Sea still to cross, in the energy of a faith suited to the greater glory of the new dispensation, he is inviting them to take up the song of Moses, and to say, “Sing to the Lord,

for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea." The time has come for the bruising of Satan's head, and for the ransom of his miserable captives. Lift up your heads, for your salvation draweth nigh. The Son of Man is travailing in the greatness of his strength, and divine love hath her perfect work, for truth hath sprung out of the earth, and righteousness is looking down from heaven, and the Lord shall give you that which is good, and the world shall yield an abundant increase.

Jehovah thus speaks from the bright cloud, but the first sensation of the disciples is not that of joy. They fall prostrate on their faces. They know in whose awful presence they are, and their strength is withered. Yet the voice comes in the melting tenderness of love. It is a voice which proclaims peace on earth and good-will to men. It announces the sacred re-union of man with God. This is my Son, whom you have rightly recognised as the eternal and only-begotten of the Father—as God manifest in the flesh—before all worlds, and above them all—the first-born of every creature—who was in the beginning with God, and is God—by whom all things were created—the Word through whom the Father always has manifested himself to the sons of men—the King of kings and the Lord of lords—who upholds all things and reigns over them all—the blessed and only potentate, before whose glorious throne the seraphim veil their faces;—my beloved Son—beloved in his lowliness as he was on his throne—beloved in this very work which he hath come to the earth to do—not banished from the Father's presence, but coming forth to do his will! In him I am well pleased—pleased even to bruise him and put him to grief—pleased in his obedience and holy sacrifice. To him, therefore, belongs access to me as a priest. He is the one priest over the household of faith—holy, harmless,

and undefiled—the spotless Lamb of God, in whom Satan finds nothing—in whom God finds unfailing satisfaction. Hear him—his word is to you a revelation and a law. In him centres all wisdom—from him all light emanates. Hear and your souls shall live—be deaf to his voice and ye shall die.

Thus, in brief and emphatic terms, Jehovah proclaims Christ to be the only king, and priest, and prophet of his people. Through him they are to know his truth—by his sacrifice their sins are to be purged away—to him they are to render obedience as the supreme Lord of all lords. He assumes not any of these offices to himself, but has been designated, and ordained to them all.

In these same terms God is still speaking to us, not, it is true, in that radiance of light which shone in the bright cloud that overshadowed the disciples, but not the less really and emphatically. That word once spoken remains for ever true, and it is for ever a present truth. To Christ and his work, his sonship, his sacrifice, his prophetic office, God demands now, as then, a submissive reverent attention, not more for his own glory, than for our well-being. What a profound and eternal interest we have in this requirement! It concerns us to hear him before and above all things. His claim is always the first one—first because of him who speaks—first in the importance of what he says. He, the eternal and invisible God, in whom we live, by whom we are to be judged, is speaking thus to us now—has been thus speaking to the world for eighteen hundred years; pointing out Christ to us, and demanding that we should hear him. Have we truly heard this voice, and yielded our hearts to its gracious sound? We have all heard, of course, that God has so spoken, and our eyes have been turned to this sacred scene on the Mount. It is a venerable tradition, an

interesting record of the past. But to many this is all. They are content to know that such things have been, but they will not believe that they are *now*. They understand that God has once spoken, but they cannot hear him speaking now. God himself has become to them a history, and not a living and present God. Alas, for human unbelief and blindness! God is not removed into the distant past, is not a God who *has* lived and acted, but a God with whom *now* we have to do—a God who has come nigh to us in mercy and judgment, demanding our regard, not to a Saviour who *was*, but who *now* is, though now we see him not. The scene has disappeared, indeed, from the bodily eye, and has become, so far, a historic record, but it embodies and reveals an everlasting truth. The love of the Father to the Son is the same now as it was then. All the relations which this glorious scene sets forth are eternal. That word once uttered has never returned again—it is a voice to be heard through all time, as the present utterance of Jehovah, announcing his satisfaction in the work of Jesus Christ, and proclaiming salvation through him.

Has God been thus speaking to us, and have we heard his voice and obeyed it? Have we become truly hearers of Jesus, is he revealing himself to us, and do we serve and worship him? Have we been able so to recognise in him a present Saviour, and to enter into this personal living relation to him? These disciples not only heard him speak on the earth—his voice became even more audible to them than ever when he had risen, and was hid from mortal eyes. They have recorded his words, not to let us know that he had once spoken, but as setting forth his perpetual admonition to the sons of men. It is Jesus who still speaks to us in this wise—speaks as a present living Saviour entreating us to hear him. Oh it is not enough to hear sermons or read



them, or even to read the Bible ; the grand duty and necessity is to hear Jesus. My function is to invite you to hear him, and not to utter my own thoughts. If you hear not him, there is to you no worship, no divine wisdom, no life. If your souls do not own and come into converse with the living Saviour, your religion is a dead formalism—hateful both to God and man.

Come, then, and deal with Christ himself—he hears you and speaks to you. He is not far from any one of us. Let us realize this august and solemn scene. We are veritably under the shadow of that bright cloud. Our eyes may have hitherto been heavy with sleep, and insensible to the glory into the presence of which we have been ushered. Let that voice of the Lord arouse us. Jesus is, indeed, within the brightness—the inaccessible glory—but not, therefore, far away from us. Nay, he is here—in this sure word of his, in these ordinances of his grace. Open your eyes and behold the Lamb of God. Do you not feel that an absent Saviour will not serve your need—a Saviour long since dead? We are hastening on to the bar of judgment, and are about to enter within the curtain which veils eternity. We are passing onward there—helpless, laden with iniquity, we are passing on to a hopeless doom. We need to be cleansed—to be clothed, washed, justified, sanctified. Who is to do this for us and upon us—to work in us this mighty transformation? Not a history certainly, nor forms of devotion, nor a church, nor a priesthood. We must get to Christ personally and deal with him, and be washed in the fountain which has been opened for uncleanness. Either this, or eternal wrath—eternal death. Oh what presumption, what wickedness, what deceitfulness of sin is in us if we do not hear ! But the Word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart ; if thou wilt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,

and wilt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me. Behold, Lord, I am helpless and vile: lift me up, and clothe me in that raiment clean and white which is the righteousness of the saints. Hear him for your life always. Let his word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Let all apparent temporary interests yield to that first and highest one. Follow the Lord fully, and so you shall not perish in the wilderness, but enter into and inherit the rest prepared for the people of God. That path is the noblest one now, and it is the only one which has a blessed termination. Tread it firmly and right onward, for Jesus not only commands but is with you in it—your priest, your guide, your ruler.

In this voice from the cloud, then, we recognise an announcement by Jehovah,—1st, of Christ's kingly office; 2d, of his priestly office; 3d, of his prophetic office. The scene is a solemn investiture by him who sent him with all these offices, and conveys the assurance that he will perfectly fulfil all the functions belonging to them. And still farther, we look to these words of Jehovah—1st, as a present utterance on his part proclaiming Christ's glory; and, 2d, as calling us to the discharge of a present and pressing duty—the duty, namely, of receiving and obeying Christ, and of walking now and always in his counsel, and by the light of his wisdom.

#### § VII. IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE VISION.

We proceed now to notice the immediate effect which this announcement had on the minds of the three disciples.

They were sore afraid when witnessing the conference between Jesus and the two glorified saints. Their fear becomes more overwhelming when they hear the voice from the cloud. They fall on their faces.

So has it been always with man consciously in the presence of Jehovah. It was so with Isaiah before the throne that was high and lifted up. So it was with Daniel when the Lord spoke to him by the banks of the river Hiddekel, when he felt that there was no strength remaining in him, and that his comeliness was turned into corruption. So it was with John, who, when he saw the majesty of the Lord, fell at his feet as one dead. So, doubtless, also, it was with the patriarch Job, when his eye saw the Lord, and when he therefore abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. This was the lesson which these disciples needed to learn, in order to remove their ignorant and wicked objections to the suffering and death of Jesus. This was for them the grand lesson of the vision, and, for a time at least, it seems to have impressed itself upon their minds. It was this sense of their own utter unworthiness which was needed by them as a preparation for their reception of the gracious truth which was unfolded by the death of Christ. For them otherwise this vision had been in vain. It was not enough that they should know that Moses and Elias did not consider Jesus as degraded and disgraced by the death he was to endure, but chose it as the theme of their high converse on the Mount. It was vain for them even to know that, in becoming the surety and substitute of sinners, Jesus was doing that which was well-pleasing to Jehovah. The meaning, and propriety, and necessity of that death could only be vindicated to their consciousness by a sense of their own vileness and guilt. And when the Lord spoke from the cloud they were overwhelmed by a sense of sin. Whatever consciousness of

worth or merit they might have elsewhere, in that awful presence, they were bowed down to the earth, and their comeliness was turned to corruption.

So must it be with us also. When we choose to regard God as at a distance from us, and when we shut him out of our thoughts, we live at ease as we are—troubled, it may be, sometimes with some dim apprehensions of guilt and foreshadowings of punishment—but these pass away, and our sin is forgotten, and a Saviour uncared for. We may, indeed, speak of him, and admire his character, and even meditate on the glorious perfection of his work, but there will be no self appropriation of him till the Father has revealed his glory to our souls. Then, when we see God and know that we are in his presence, we will be made to abhor ourselves, and we must find this Saviour, and lay hold on him for eternal life. There will be no rest or peace for us till he say, “thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged.”

To a sinner thus conscious of his guilt, ready to perish, and stretching out his hand for help, that Saviour is ever near. It was so in the experience of these disciples, when prostrate and abased in the presence of this glorious revelation which was made to them. Jesus comes and touches them, and says, “Arise, and be not afraid.” There is a restorative power in that touch and word. It lifts them up and imparts strength to them. And for us, as for them, there is no rising up from that prostrate helplessness and fear, except in this way. Struck down under a sense of sin, we do not arise and go to Jesus; he comes and touches us, and establishes his identity with us. We cannot go for help—help comes to us—so near is Christ, and so infinitely gracious. It is not so much we that have found him, as he that finds us; he came to call sinners, he still

receiveth them, and enters into personal and most friendly fellowship with them. When by the Spirit there has been revealed to us the divine majesty and holiness, and when in the presence of that, we are self emptied, without strength, prostrated in the dust, Christ comes forth and touches us. We shall never find him otherwise than thus. How many have sought him long years in vain—groping their way to find salvation, and whose search has been fruitless ; till worn out, exhausted, all resources and methods having been tried without avail, they have sat down in conscious helplessness, almost in despair—and then, when prostrate, with their faces on the ground, Jesus has touched them, and dispelled their fear, and made darkness light about them. What lies between us and Christ is always some consciousness of ability, some sense of a capacity to *do*, as if we could in some way make salvation our own. That being removed, Christ is already with the helpless and guilty soul, and lifts it from the horrible pit and the miry clay. What, then, are we to do ? Are we to sit at ease till Christ come and deliver us ? No, verily, for he will never come to us thus at all. By all means seek salvation, seek Christ, take heaven by violence. Such striving, if it attain no other object, will, at least, land you where Christ will touch and lift you up. It will teach you your helplessness and sin, and then Christ will save you.

Now that the three disciples are again set on their feet, that glorious majesty which had filled their souls with terror, is no longer visible. When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man save Jesus only. Is there not here also a profound spiritual truth ? Does it not set forth in history the experience of the delivered and ransomed soul ? At one moment, all is fear and conscious vileness—self-condemnation—conscious desert of wrath, the yawning pit



beneath, and death and hell ready to seize their prey. And now, again, under the gracious power of that touch of Jesus, it is he alone whom we see—our brother, our friend, our Saviour. Now all is peace. The terror of the night is past, the morning light has come, the Sun of Righteousness has arisen on us with healing in his wings. Then it was an angry God with whom we had to do, now it is a loving and gracious Saviour. Our eyes see only him, and God's eyes see only him, for in that sacred touch we have been incorporated into one. We have found the daysman between us who is able to lay his hand on us both. Now there is no condemnation—we have passed from death to life and have peace with God, who in Jesus has become to us a Father. Most blessed and life-giving sight, to see Jesus alone, to feel his restoring, re-invigorating power—to have our eye fastened upon and filled with the vision of the Lamb of God—to be so near him, and so quickened by him! Shall we not seek this resting-place and consummation of all our hope? Behold the Lamb of God. This is the divine invitation and command. He has been lifted up upon the cross that he might draw all men unto him.

But now they come down from that mount of revelation, Jesus and they together. He is restored again to his former appearance, and walks with them as he did before. Their hearts are filled with many thoughts and forebodings. They find themselves unable to apprehend fully what they had seen, and yet to them there was much that was precious in the vision. For it is not by that alone which the understanding fully masters, that the soul is profited. Now and hereafter these men were destined to stand face to face with many awful mysteries. It was good that so it should be—good for them and for us—that the pride of the understanding should be brought to contemplate those things which

are above the reach of our knowledge—to be made to feel that in this spiritual world there are heights which we cannot scale, and depths which we cannot fathom.

As they descend from the mountain Jesus charges them to tell no man what they had seen until after his resurrection, and this time, at least they keep his charge. Now it seems to them good that they should keep these things in their hearts. For this there were many reasons, but chiefly these.

1st, That which led to the vision being revealed to them alone, and not even to the other disciples. These three in fact had made further progress in divine knowledge than the rest. They were able to apprehend more of the mystery of godliness—of the incarnation—of the work and glory of Christ—and therefore to them only the revelation was made. But they felt that they had been brought into connection with things too high for them. They could not speak of what they had seen and heard. They could not frame into fitting words the overwhelming impressions and awful thoughts which now occupied them. They could not make these things intelligible to others, for themselves did not yet comprehend them. They felt as if, like Paul, they had been taken into the third heavens, and had heard things which it was not lawful for them to utter.

2d, Jesus coupled with his charge of secrecy a limitation as to time. He permitted them to tell this vision when the Son of Man was risen from the dead. This was to them a terrible perplexity. They could not speak of what they had seen without having their minds fastened upon Christ's death. This revelation somehow was connected with that fact. It was to them still a most painful fact. When Jesus had spoken of it before, they had received his statement with incredulous indignation. They felt that they had

sinned in so doing. And they have now prepared themselves to bear alone the burden of that great mystery. They will not provoke the hostility of the rest by alluding to it.

In one form or another this reserve and silence are imposed upon all men who have meditated deeply on the mysteries of salvation, and have been brought near to the inaccessible glory. Such men feel that there have entered into their minds thoughts too big for utterance, and that it is best to leave this unattempted—to ponder them for a season in their hearts till their soul has been made more apprehensive—and then only to speak when they have come definitely to know. It is a kind of reverence which becomes us when we endeavour to see and understand those things which are hidden from the eye of sense—when we stand looking out into the Infinite and Eternal—and when the shadow of their brightness falls upon our souls. The time will doubtless come to speak—but first there is a time to meditate—lest we desecrate and degrade that knowledge which is too high for us. This shadow of the Infinite will more or less rest on our mind till we, too, have been raised from the dead, and then we shall know even as we are known.

## CHAPTER IV.

CHRIST THE LIGHT AND STRENGTH OF THE  
CHURCH.

Matt. xvii. 10—27. Mark ix. 11—32.

## § 1. A DIFFICULTY STATED AND SOLVED.

With the first disciples the present was a time for deep enquiry. They had been brought near to the inaccessible light. Their faith in Christ had led to a glorious revelation of him. In the rapid increase of their knowledge it happened to them, as it happens always in the experience of men in like circumstances, that new difficulties unthought of before start up in their path and seem to impede their progress. It belongs to a state of quiescent ignorance to receive all things on trust, to perceive no difficulties—to walk onward in security, where others would stumble and fall—to realise the truth, that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” Hitherto this had been very much the condition of these men. They simply saw and heard, and they had no questions to put, merely because they had not deeply considered the facts which they witnessed and the words which they heard. They desired no explanation, for they had never sought to harmonise and arrange what they had seen and heard, so as to make of these facts a harmonious whole. They looked at the facts singly, and without regard to their relations. They made no enquiry into the whence, and wherefore. Henceforth we shall

notice a marked difference in their history. They have now reached that stage of intellectual development, when questioning becomes a necessity, and we shall find them once and again seeking the solution of difficulties and putting questions to the Lord.

It is thus always in the growth and development of the mind. There is a time during which men are merely recipients; and there are many indeed who never get beyond this stage of advancement. But when the mind not only receives but acts, when it begins to exercise itself upon what it sees and hears, everything must be put to the proof. Every new fact raises a question, and the old ground is trodden over again with an open eye and a questioning mind. There is a demand for order, harmony, unity, system. What seems to fall in with these is accepted, and what does not must stand aside for further questioning. This is a period of peculiar danger in the history of the mind, and from a state of easy credulity we are very apt to pass at once into a state of scepticism. Hitherto everything has been received unquestioned, but now everything is rejected which cannot answer to our questioning, or which cannot be fully explained. It is the province of a yet higher intelligence patiently to await the solution of many difficulties, not to reject a thing as untrue because we cannot comprehend it, but to examine the evidence of the fact, and, having ascertained that, to let it stand over meanwhile as an unexplained mystery, which our further progress may unveil to us, but which cannot, in its nature and bearings, be unravelled now. It is in the study of revelation peculiarly that we need this humble, docile habit of mind. We need to put forth upon it indeed an enquiring mind, to prove all things, to satisfy our inherent instinct for harmony, and order, and unity, to put every truth and fact in its place, and to arrange and



systematize them all. But in this domain of the spiritual and supernatural, there are always questions arising,—questions which are too profound for human logic and system, and these not occurring to us here and there, but overspreading the whole with a veil of mystery, within which we are ever forced back, whatever point we may seek to establish. It is here we come into contact with the Infinite and Eternal, which are ever to us incomprehensible. We cannot fathom them without being able to comprehend God, and he is unsearchable. Clouds and darkness are round about his throne. Such knowledge is too high for us. Revelation is the expression of the mind of God, and therefore always extends beyond our scale of measurement. This fact alone proves it to be divine. Were it human it might be entirely comprehensible. Even inspired men themselves searched into what and what manner of things the Spirit, which was in them, did testify, when he spoke of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which was to be revealed.

This circumstance has opened to men a threefold course in their treatment of revelation. 1st. To reject the whole as a fable, because they cannot reduce its statements under the categories of their philosophy. 2d. To fall back upon the child-like credulity of the undeveloped and merely recipient mind. 3d. To receive on God's testimony that which reaches beyond their comprehension, to ascertain that it is God's testimony, and then to exercise their mind upon it, to educe its order, and harmony, and unity, and so to digest and use it both for themselves and others.

Society has its mental development as well as the individual soul, and we have now arrived at that era in the world's history when men of profound and enquiring minds are compelled to follow one of the three courses now indicated—either the rash and sceptical one, of renouncing every-

thing which is not perfectly understood, or the equally easy one, of yielding themselves up as the slaves of a vain superstition, or, finally, to become intelligent believers in God's word. The number and character of those who have followed the second of these courses has in our day excited considerable astonishment. It ought not to do so. It is a course quite natural to a soul shrinking from personal communion with God, and yet overwhelmed and oppressed with the insoluble difficulties which revelation presents. It is the learned, and, in one sense, the profoundly thinking, who are brought into the nearest contact with these difficulties—who are overwhelmed by their force—who stand face to face with them, questioning in vain the thick clouds and darkness which envelope the throne of God—and who, wearied out with the vain effort, fall into the easy lap of superstition, and resolve to believe everything, because they cannot explain everything. In such a position a man must become defiant, and reject everything; or credulous, and believe everything; or, with earnest eye and open heart, he must question, not the darkness, but the living God who dwells within it, and, in patient prayer, wait till the day dawn and the day star arise in his heart. Revelation itself, unless we reject it altogether, demands that we enquire, and search, and know. But faith in it stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the revelation of God. It forbids us to receive what man teaches, and proclaims God as himself the teacher of every man. It is, therefore, the root and parent of religion, because it brings every man to deal directly and personally with God.

To revert, however, to the case of the disciples, let us notice how what we have stated harmonizes with this development of mind and its guiding influences. From the moment of their significant and noble confession of Christ as the Son of the living God, they had ceased to be mere

passive recipients of information. They had become confessors, exercising their minds and expressing the thoughts which arose within them. It is at this stage that Jesus meets them with that most important and most necessary of all statements, involving a caution and counsel. "Flesh and blood have not revealed this, but my Father." To this extent God has been their teacher, and they are to know him as such henceforth, to ask him for light and information, for an understanding mind, and for a patient loving heart. Henceforth they are directed to appeal to, and wait on him, to bring under his eye all information and all truth, and to submit themselves in meek docility to his teaching. They did not give heed to this counsel, and so immediately they had been plunged into error. They could not reconcile the death of Jesus with their ideas of harmony, and order, and congruity, and resented the very thought of it as an insult. In the loving-kindness and forbearance of Jesus they were not cast off in their presumption. He brings them into a position where their presumption might be manifest to themselves. He leads them into the very presence of him whom he had revealed as their Father, even the Father of Lights, and gives such revelations of glory that in the midst of it they knew not what they said. They thus again become teachable, not indeed in the sense of a second childhood, as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the Word. In understanding they are now men, not mere recipients of what they are told, but putting forth their minds upon it, and endeavouring to comprehend and to master it—to digest and make it their own. Now, therefore, they become questioners. With their understandings so opened, difficulties present themselves which seek a solution. They must compare, deliberate, conclude. They must make sure of every step, and walk forward in the light which had

shined upon them from above. This is the condition in which henceforth we see them. Concerning the very next miracle which is wrought, for example, they have a question to be solved. Sometimes, indeed, in their humility they are afraid to put the questions which suggest themselves to their minds, but they always stand in this enquiring, and at the same time docile attitude to all truth.

I have adverted to this fact the more particularly because it has an extensive practical bearing. I have adverted to the snares which beset the path of thinking men, but of one snare and delusion I have not spoken, and it is that into which the greater number of gospel hearers fall, namely—a tacit contentment with that state of mind in which they are mere recipients. I do not say that this state of mind is inconsistent with vital Christianity. I desire to remember the fact that there are babes in Christ, who receive and grow by the sincere milk of the Word. But in this state they are always babes, and never grow up to be men. But the law of the spiritual, as of the natural life, is growth. It is not a healthy state of existence to be always a babe. It indicates some radical disease, and tends to stupidity.

But, moreover, this mere receptivity—this tacit, moveless, irresponsive acquiescence—does not necessarily imply life at all. It indicates most frequently the reverse. The mud wall buries in its bosom all the artillery which is levelled against it, but it does not incorporate it into its own substance. It still remains nothing but mud. Thus many have contentedly heard the gospel who never tried to understand and make it really their own—who have never been stirred to question, to prove it—to try its adaptation to their own state and condition—who have no wish to be informed, to grow in knowledge, and who dwell self-satisfied in a region of dead commonplaces and formulas, more fatal even

than blank ignorance. Beware, I pray you, of this deadly lethargy of the soul. Digest, and make your own of, what you hear. Do not walk onward in the light of a lamp which is in the hands of others. Make that lamp your own—buy oil for it—keep it freshly trimmed, and you shall be as virgins waiting the call of the bridegroom, and shall sit down at the marriage supper.

The first disciples, as we have seen, are not now in this condition. To them, at last, stirred up to reflect on what they had seen and heard—passing out of the state of childhood and becoming men—a difficulty immediately appears to lie in the way of the good confession which they had now witnessed. That difficulty does not lead them in the least to doubt the truth which they had confessed regarding the person of Christ. They are now surer than ever that Jesus is the Christ. But they wish to be put in the position not merely of cherishing this good hope, but of being able to render to every man a reason of the hope that is in them. How are they to answer the scribes if they should start this objection, “Must not Elias first come before Christ?” Having become confessors of Christ, they find that they must now be armed as his soldiers, and be able to defend the faith they have professed. Their questioning is by no means sceptical, as ours ought never to be, else we shall never learn. It is docile. They have not sought for a difficulty. They find it lying directly across their path, and earnestly desire the information by which it may be removed. They had heard the statement that Elias must first come from the lips of the authorised interpreters of God’s word, and they had heard it probably alleged as a reason why no one could look on Jesus as the promised Messiah. They do not themselves seem to have known the passage of Scripture on which the scribes grounded their statement. They



wish to know whether such a passage existed. They are not learned men, but poor fishermen. They are unlearned even in the holy Scriptures.

Their question, and the form in which it is put, are strongly suggestive of the condition, in a religious aspect, of the Jewish people at the advent of Christ. It is true, indeed, that the Scriptures were read in their synagogues, but this was done very much as part of a liturgical service. The reading of prayers, and the reading of the scripture of the day, was a matter of routine and form. What really engaged their minds, and what the scribes took pains to teach, were the traditions by which the commandment of God was made void. Hence we find that when the Magi came to Jerusalem at the birth of Christ, reference had to be made to the scribes for information as to the predicted place of his birth; and so also now we find the disciples personally ignorant of an equally remarkable prophecy regarding his forerunner. The people, from the highest to the lowest, had evidently sunk into a state of profound ignorance of the Scriptures as a whole. It is a natural, almost an inevitable result in all churches, in which liturgic forms, take the precedence of an exposition and application of the Word of God, and, above all, when a traditional human law has taken the place of that which is divine and eternal. To be delivered out of that condition, and to come into close inquiring contact with the Word of God, is the first step towards a revival and restoration.

But let us now notice the answer of Jesus to the question of the disciples. It was an answer doubtless quite contrary to their expectations. They had ceased to believe absolutely in the scribes, and thought that in alleging what they did they had been mistaken, or had wilfully perverted the truth. Jesus answers that the scribes were right. The

prediction was plainly enough written. It was among the last words of the Old Testament Scriptures, and on that account all the more memorable: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." There it stood plainly written, Elias must first come. But how was this? Could this then be the Christ? Elias had not come so far as they knew, except as they saw him in glory for a little on the Mount. His appearance there, had evidently suggested this question about him to the disciples and perhaps also was the groundwork of the proposal of Peter there to erect tabernacles for them, because the predicted coming of Elias was not to be a momentary appearance. He was to do a predicted work, the same in kind as that which he had attempted to do in Israel of old. This work implied a continued residence on the earth. By all this, however, the difficulty was increased. Certainly Elias must come, and certainly also he must do his work, and restore all things. But had he come,—had he done this work?

Jesus hastens to remove the difficulty: "I say unto you that Elias has come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed." The disciples were at no loss to perceive the meaning of this declaration. They understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist. In this forerunner of Jesus the prophecy was fulfilled. Not, indeed, that Elias had personally come to attempt over again that work to which he had set himself when on the earth; but in conformity with the word of the angel to Zacharias before his birth, John the Baptist had gone before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to

the wisdom of the just. He had gone forth preaching the doctrine of repentance, the restoration of that which was fallen and decayed—not to introduce a new economy, but to repair the desolations of many generations. This was his work, a work which he faithfully accomplished. It was unsuccessful, indeed, in its results, as the work of Elijah had been, but not therefore on his part the less zealously executed. He was the Elias who was to come before the Lord.

We ascribe the fulfilment of this prophecy to John the Baptist on the highest of all authority, that, namely, of Jesus himself. Yet it was not thus, evidently, that the scribes or the disciples expected it to be fulfilled. They imagined that Elias was to come personally. But it was not he who really came, but one in his spirit and power. And this infallible interpretation of the prophetic record should furnish us with a key to the interpretation of all the prophecies of a like kind. It not only permits us to look for, but suggests that what we are to look for in prophetic fulfilment is not the letter but the spirit of prophecy—not the resuscitation of persons, but the revival of the spirit whereby holy men of old were animated, and of the work in which they were engaged.

In looking back to what had befallen his forerunner, Jesus again adverts also to his own rejection and death. To him also the Jews would do what they listed. On this grand fact he wishes to fasten their minds—that they might grow into familiarity with it. This was essential to their whole spiritual education and growth. Till they could look with gratitude and love to the suffering Saviour, and understand what was implied in that truth, their minds must continue darkened and perplexed. And for us, as for them, this is the grand central truth. Apprehending that

aright, many mysteries will be solved. It is at the foot of the cross that we find peace, and it is there also that darkness becomes light about us.

## § II. HELPLESSNESS OF THE DISCIPLES MANIFESTED.

While Jesus has been absent on the Mount, the multitude have assembled near its base. It is not difficult to conceive the circumstances which have brought them together. If these are not directly stated they are necessarily suggested by the narrative under consideration. Previous to this time the power of Jesus to heal diseases and cast out devils was everywhere recognised. Wherever he went the people brought to him those possessed with devils, and affected with all manner of diseases, and he manifested his power and grace in healing them all. It is to be remembered, also, that he had sent the twelve through the land on a similar errand of mercy, at once to preach the gospel, and to heal diseases, and cast out devils, and that they had found the power of Christ with them every where effective to heal. In these circumstances it is not surprising that wherever they remained for a few days a multitude of people should be gathered around them—some drawn by sore distempers which they wished to have removed, and others by their mere love of wonder-seeing.

In the absence of Jesus such an occasion has now arisen, and the sufferer is brought to the nine disciples, who for a time were separated from the Lord, and from the brethren who were with Jesus on the Mount. The case which was submitted to them as we have it here described was a very aggravated one. A child, the only son of his father, is grievously tormented by a devil, and the father, in his anxiety

and love, seeks for his son the only means of relief which are open to him. He comes to these successful exorcists to have the devil cast out. And they are not unwilling to try their power. But to their surprise and disappointment they find that this evil spirit is not obedient to their authority. Among that multitude, moreover, as indeed we find them almost always dogging the footsteps of Jesus and his disciples, there are scribes watching with a jealous eye their every act and word. And on this occasion these scribes seem to themselves to have won a victory. The disciples have for once been foiled in their ministry of mercy, and when Jesus returns he finds a fierce controversy raging between the scribes and them. The scribes are taunting the disciples with their failure, with their confidence in Jesus, and with the delusion under which they had laboured. It seemed to them as if at last this disturbing element was to be taken out of their way, as if their jealous hostility to Jesus was to meet with its reward, and as if the old reign of pharisaism was about to be restored. It is indeed a fearful position in which they place themselves, but one by no means uncommon in the history of the enemies of Christ's cause and truth. To them it is a triumph that Satan continues to hold his own. It would have been a vexation and defeat to have seen him expelled. So has it uniformly been with churches and individuals of the true sectarian spirit, and which arrogate to themselves exclusively the favour of the Almighty. They would rather that good remained undone, than that it should be accomplished by the hands of another than themselves.

In this scene of confusion and conflict and helplessness, too, there was manifested that truth which the church has often had occasion to learn. This, in fact, was but a repetition of the scene of disorder and sin and disgrace which



had of old been enacted at the foot of Sinai itself, when Moses and Joshua his servant, were absent on the Mount. In their absence the enemy found his advantage, and for a brief season triumphed over the prostrate faith of the people. Here again the same thing essentially occurs. Faith loses her accustomed strength, and Satan keeps his hold, and the infant church looks helplessly on, and the scribes glory in having recovered the ground they had lost. So needful is the presence of Christ with his church always. Without him she is powerless for good, and defenceless in the presence of her enemies. Here, as elsewhere, the outward historic fact is pregnant with a profound spiritual lesson. The disciples find that the mere words of their accustomed exorcism have no power over the Evil One—that the ordinary instrumentality is no longer followed by the wonted results.

It is thus always that the absence of Christ from the church is manifested. She may retain her orthodox forms, but they have no power to cast out the devil. He, in the presence, and in the midst of the church, sets her at defiance and keeps possession of his victims. It is time, in such a case, for the church to betake herself to prayer, humiliation, and fasting—with earnest heart to seek the return of the Lord, the presence and active power of a living faith, the grace of lowly repentance, if Christ is not henceforth to be dishonoured and his cause lost. Christ dwells in the hearts of his people by faith. Where there is a living faith he is, and where he is, his gracious power is manifested in destroying the works of the devil. Have we not reason even now to pause, to enquire, to humble ourselves, to cry for the Lord's help, to repent in dust and ashes, to wait earnestly and hopefully for refreshing rains from heaven, and the power and unction of the Holy One?

## § 3. APPEARANCE OF JESUS ON THE SCENE.

To this scene, and to the perplexed and humbled disciples, Jesus comes. They have undertaken to cast out an evil spirit, and they find that they cannot. This spirit possesses a malignity and power too deep to be unseated by them, and the angry and jealous scribes are there, rejoicing in their defeat and pressing their advantage to the uttermost—urging, probably, that as the disciples have proved unequal to this task, so would their master also were he put to the same test. Then, and in this position of affairs, Jesus comes, and his first business is with these scribes. “What question ye with them?” Your business must now be with me.

But even before he has time to press them thus, his coming has created a great sensation among the crowd, which tends at once to overawe the scribes, and to restore confidence and hope to the distracted people. We are told that straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. What produces in them this great amazement? It is a feeling quite different from the revival of despondent hope, and of eager anticipation, as to how he would answer the scribes, and dispose of this most critical and urgent case. They are amazed by his very presence. Is it unwarrantable to suppose that he comes among them, yet bearing upon his person the traces of that glory which had clothed him on the Mount?—that, returning from thence, his face and person are yet glistening with the reminiscences of his high and holy converse there?—that even as Moses, after his forty days’ sojourn on Mount Sinai, bore on his countenance the im-

press of the glory in the midst of which he had been dwelling, so is it now with Jesus? Yet, in the case of Jesus, the impression produced is widely different. When Moses descended among the people they entreated him to put a veil on his face, for they could not endure to look on it, because his face was gleaming with the terrible lightnings in the midst of which God gave forth the words of his law. But when Jesus descends from the Mount of Transfiguration, the glory of his face is attractive, full of grace and beauty, drawing men to him in their amazement, so that they run and salute him. It is a picture of the two dispensations—the glory of the one, threatening in its aspect, foreboding wrath and bondage—the glory of the other, resplendent with love—love in its utmost tenderness and power. It was such love that he needed, in order to endure the unbelief and perverse wickedness of men; and such love was not withheld. What a contrast it was for Jesus again to encounter the contradiction of sinners, and the inexcusable weakness of his disciples. As one has well said, “The sight and sounds which greeted him on his return to a sinful world, how different from those which he had just left upon the holy Mount! There were the highest harmonies of heaven—here some of the wildest and harshest discords of earth. There he had been receiving honour and glory from the Father—here the disciples, those to whom his work had been entrusted in his absence, had been procuring for him, as far as in them lay, shame and dishonour. But, as when some great captain suddenly arriving upon the field of battle, when his subordinate lieutenants have well-nigh lost the day, and brought all into hopeless confusion, with his eye measures at once the necessities of the moment, and, with no more than his presence, causes the tide of victory to turn, and everything to right itself again,

so was it now. The Lord arrests the advancing and victorious foe, addresses himself to the scribes, and saying, "What question ye with them?" takes the baffled and hard pressed disciples under his own protection, and, standing forth as their captain and leader, says, in substance, "If you have any question henceforth, it must be with me."<sup>1</sup>

It is thus that the controversy always stands between the church and the world. There is in this fact an impressive lesson for them both. To the church it says, Be not faint-hearted in the day of rebuke, and trouble, and blasphemy, when Satan, so far from being bruised under your feet, appears rampant and victorious. Know where lies the secret of your strength. Be not faithless, but believing. Standing beside Christ—when you have again invoked his presence, and laid hold on the living Saviour, you become invincible. The crowd of your opponents shall not prevail against you. You are well nigh overwhelmed because you have lost your hold on Christ. Satan can keep his ground against you. He can turn the battle against you, standing alone without shield or spear, on the high places of the field. But the Captain of your salvation awaits your call. Go after him to the battle, and the victory is yours. A church without that faith which realizes and assures the presence of the living Saviour, can do nothing. In this faith she can vanquish and bind Satan.

To the opponents of God's cause and truth this fact has also its lesson. When they are rejoicing in the church's weakness, and believe that her glory has departed, and with the mocking Samaritans of old, say, "What do these feeble Jews?" let them understand that it is not man with whom they have come into conflict, but with the Lord. They may press hard the feeble band of disciples, but it is with

<sup>1</sup> *Trench on the Miracles.*

Jesus himself they must come to a reckoning at last. They may perplex *them* with hard questions, but they must state their case before a higher tribunal.

It has all along, indeed, been the art and policy of the world to shift this high battle ground—to evade the controversy with the Lord—and to convert it into a mere human controversy. These skilful scribes gloried over the weakness of the nine disciples. But, even supposing they had entirely defeated them; what then? The cause was not lost because these few had been unbelieving, and having cast away the shield of faith, were unable to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. So has it been since, in every age. Weakness and want of energy in the church—its maladministration—the errors and imperfections of its members—these have all been noted, recorded, heaped up as arguments against Christianity itself. The inferential argument has ever been, these cannot cast out Satan, and therefore he whose name they bear cannot. This inference is an unjust one. Whatever in a church, or in an individual member of it, is wrong, let it be condemned. It is good that even the ungodly world should condemn and rebuke it, in order that they may be provoked to cast it away. But what though these are weak, and stained with many faults, the question still is, what of Christ himself and his truth? These may be erring representatives of both. Jesus himself challenges you to a bolder and nobler warfare; what question ye with them? if it be a question of divine power and grace to destroy the works of the devil, it is with me ye have to do. These may have or want those attributes, but what will ye answer to me? Do you desire the forthputting of my power to destroy the works of the devil? These scribes were dumb when Jesus so spake in their presence, and his adversaries are dumb still.



They dare not put Christ to the proof. They do not indeed positively believe in such a power, but they are afraid to call forth its exercise, for they are afraid that it *may* exist.

What an admonition is there here to watchfulness, humility, and prayer, and, above all, through these, to the cherishing of a lively faith on the part of all Christ's disciples. It is not your own honour that is concerned, but that of the Lord himself. The world reads the character and strength of Christ in the light of your conversation and conduct. Bearing his name, you become his witnesses among men. As you are, so they believe Christ to be. Alas ! how much, unbelief is strengthened, and ungodliness encouraged, by the inconsistent, inharmonious lives of Christ's disciples, real and formal. They are wrong doubtless in charging your weaknesses and offences on Christ. But surely you are far from blameless in presenting to the enemy such a mark for the weapons of their assault.

The scribes, as we have said, answer nothing to Christ's challenge. They are willing to let the matter rest where it is. But there is one in that crowd who has a far deeper and more direct interest in it than they. It is concerning the cure of his only and sore afflicted son, about which this whole question has been raised. There is here for him something far higher than a controversy. It is to him a matter of life and death. His heart is bound up in that child. The daily torture of that child makes his own life most miserable. He makes the case of the child his own. If Christ has the power to heal, he at least is willing to put it to the proof. He feels the need of its exercise, and therefore makes his appeal to the compassion of Jesus. He details the terrible symptoms of the malady. It is in the statement of the case by Mark that we find the fullest description of the distemper. All the symp-

toms as there delineated by the father, or as described by the other Evangelists, exactly agree with those of epilepsy. Some of the ancient physicians indeed, in describing this disease, might almost seem to have borrowed from the account contained in this gospel history, so exactly do all the symptoms agree. In the knowledge indeed of the child's father, and of the Jews, there was something in this case besides epilepsy, but the evil spirit which possessed the child wrought through the forms of this disease. It would seem that the fits of the child were sudden and frequent, and of remarkable duration, for it is said that the evil spirit hardly departeth from him. That spirit was a dumb one, it appears, giving utterance, in his access to no articulate language, and yet constraining the child to cry out in his agony. When the spirit took him, in his might, during these paroxysms of the disorder, it tore him, till he foamed and gnashed with his teeth, and he pined away under the malady, like one the very sources of whose life were being dried up. And while these accesses of his distemper might come upon him at any moment, and in any place, they frequently exposed the unhappy sufferer to the worst accidents, for oftentimes he fell into the fire, and oft into the water. The father attributes this fact to the malignant agency of the evil spirit. Oftentimes, he says, it cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him; and when he finishes his description of the affecting case, he further tells the Lord of the ineffectual efforts which his disciples had made for his relief: "I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out and they could not."

Such were the circumstances of this case. This was the matter which had raised these questionings, which Jesus found agitating the multitude when he descended in the midst of them.

## § 4. COMPLAINT AND REPROOF OF JESUS.

It is very worthy of notice that Jesus does not, after hearing the case, address himself to the scribes. His rebuke to them lay in the deed which he is about to accomplish. He addresses himself directly to the father of this poor child, and his words contain a rebuke to him, and to the disciples, and to the assembled multitude: "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?" It is you who have given this occasion of triumph to the scribes, and caused that Satan should retain his hold. O faithless unbelieving father, thou hast, in thy deep anxiety and affection for thy son, wished this malady removed, and hast brought him to my disciples that the burden of his distemper might not lie on thy spirit, and yet in thy heart thou hast been doubting whether a cure were possible. Thou hast come rather that thou mightest leave nothing untried, than because you deemed that this method would suffice. O faithless, unbelieving disciples, you have addressed yourselves to this great work, without the strength which faith gives—you have employed the outward means, and spoken the words of adjuration, without even thinking to see them obeyed. You did not expect it, and it has not been done. O faithless, unbelieving, people, wonder seekers, and yet ignorant of the power that works these wonders, how could mighty works be done here in the face of your unbelief? In this heavy complaint and accusation, Jesus speaks expressly to a faithless generation. He charges the sin of unbelief upon all who were present at the scene—on the father of the child—on the disciples—on the multitude who stood looking on. Each of these parties had their own share in the disastrous

result, of which the scribes so gladly availed themselves, and by which the devil was enabled to retain his hold. Had the faith of the father been in active operation, the work he desired would have been done, for his confidence and hope would have restored the sinking hearts of the disciples, and brought them back to him who had given them power and authority over all devils to cast them out. Had the disciples believed, they would have felt as of old, that the power and presence of Jesus were with them to heal, and would have been delivered from their shame and disappointment. Their faith would have dispelled doubt from the heart of the father, even as Jesus now does, before he effects the cure. Had the multitude believed, the power of God would have been revealed in the midst of them. Their faithlessness hindered its exercise, even as we are elsewhere told of Jesus at Capernaum, that he could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief.

What happened here, has been taking place from age to age in the history of the church. The incapacity of the disciples, the stout resistance of the devil—their inability to destroy his works, and to limit his power, is surely no uncommon thing. It is not a matter of history merely, but of every day experience. Everywhere the devil is proving himself stronger than the disciples of Christ. He not only holds his own, but increases his power. The church stands amazed and trembling in the presence of her spiritual adversaries. Iniquity cometh in like a flood. Heresies, delusions, blasphemies, and crimes manifold, intrench themselves behind impregnable bulwarks, and the church has no artillery powerful enough to demolish them. The gospel is preached, never, perhaps, so extensively as now—the words of exorcism, so to speak, are uttered everywhere, but the divine power to heal is fearfully awanting. The arm of the

Lord seems to be shortened. The devil keeps possession of the soul, and is not subject to the word of healing, and some cry one thing, and some another,—some apparently eager to detect the source of the mischief, and to restore its lost power to the gospel; while others proclaim that it has become effete and worn out, and resolve to try the exorcism of a new philosophy and social ameliorations, forgetting the while that what renders any amelioration necessary—the thing which produces the manifold social miseries, manifesting themselves in forms as disgusting and terrible, as in the case of this poor possessed child, is just that the devil is there asserting his supremacy, and displaying the cruel tyranny of his reign, and that nothing can be done effectively till he be cast out. And our modern scribes with their proud mockery speak of the powerlessness of the gospel, and glory over its prostrate strength. The world is very much in the state now, in which that multitude were, when Jesus descended among them from the Mount of Transfiguration. The eyes of the blind are not opened, and the deaf are not made to hear, nor the dumb to speak—the dead are not raised, and no mighty works attest the presence and power of him who binds Satan and wrenches from him his prey; and the enemies of Jesus are glorying in their strength.

The cry has been raised, O for an earnest ministry! By all means, nothing is more urgently needed, nothing can be more vitally important. But that cry will not be heard and answered if it stand alone. You cannot get an earnest ministry without having something besides. These nine disciples had been earnest and successful ministers. They had found the devils subject to them, when they went over the cities formerly, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Every mountain was levelled, and their path was made plain before them, and they lacked nothing. But now they are



weak and helpless—their faith is overborne by the unbelief which encompasses them. They speak, but the devil is no longer subject to their word. Let us look to this rebuke of Jesus. There is much wisdom in it. It is a rebuke to the existing generation. It does not fall upon these ministers exclusively, but falls alike severely upon all concerned.

1st, It falls upon that unhappy father of a sorely afflicted child, and so also upon the parents of this generation. Do you think that life and grace will come to your homes from the pulpit only? It cannot do so. The pulpit may sustain, help, stimulate, and direct you, but it cannot take the charge and responsibility out of your hands. To you primarily it belongs to train your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—to wrestle for them—to travail in soul, until Christ be formed in them. By fasting, by prayer, to cast out the devil—to invoke the presence of God in your homes—and the gracious power of his Spirit—to bear your children under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty, and to seek shelter for them there, that the angels may become ministering spirits unto them, and that in the power of God they may tread upon the lion and the adder. Even when Jesus returned from the Mount, there was no deliverance for this child till faith had been awakened in the father's heart. And in your case it will be even so. Only believe, all things are possible to him who believeth. It is here in a godly home, that true religion has her abode, and manifests her strength, and is adorned with beauty. The voice of rejoicing and of melody is heard in the dwellings of the righteous. Within that sacred enclosure, sanctified by the word of God and by prayer, Satan loses his power, and his tormented victims are ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

2d, But the parent in his turn needs to be sustained and stimulated in this gracious work. In such a matter always, there is the same mutual action, as in the case of this parent and the disciples. His faith would have awakened theirs—their faith would have excited his. Faith being lively and strong in neither party, the gracious work remained undone. So it is now. Parents, it may be, are struggling against manifold temptations and difficulties, amid efforts which constantly try their patience, and depress their hope, and weaken the energy of their faith. They see how rapidly and strongly evil developes itself in the souls of their children—how powerful the hold of Satan is—what vanity is bound up in their hearts—and thus depressed, discouraged, and fainthearted, they come to the church to the ministers of Christ's word, and bring their children there. Alas ! if *there* also faith be feeble—if there be no word of strength and restoration—if in the mouth of Christ's ambassadors that word has become an empty sound ! If there stood in the pulpit a true ambassador of Christ, glowing with the light and anointed with the holy oil from the sanctuary, beseeching men in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, with the heart and hope of a true disciple, expecting and desiring the manifestation of the mighty power of Christ to save, what spirit and health and energy and hope would it spread around the family hearth, and what conquests over Satan would be achieved !

3d, But this is not all. According to the laws of the kingdom of grace, a faithless church cannot have a faithful ministry. The warmest affections may be chilled and repressed, and the liveliest faith rendered inoperative, in the face of a cold, dead, unbelieving people, who have no interest in God's message, and no desire for his salvation—who sit at their ease in Zion, and say each to himself, I am rich and

increased with goods, and have need of nothing. In such circumstances the arm of the Lord is arrested, and to an unbelieving people the Lord gives a faithless, slumbering ministry. They need, in order to do their work well, to be sustained by the faith and prayers of their people. These are to them unspeakably precious, and furnish them with weapons and strength to fight the battles of the faith. The Apostle Paul, the most successful minister of Christ that ever lived, felt and owned that his power lay here. This is evidenced by the fact, that not only in all his epistles he entreates the prayers of the church, but he expressly informs us of his design in doing this. He says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." Evidently he felt that if the prayers of the people were restrained, the word of God would be bound. That word was magnified among the Thessalonians because they prayed. So it is now, and has been in all ages. The Lord performs not his mighty works among a gainsaying and unbelieving people. Let us all then hear this word of reproof, "O faithless generation," and let parents and ministers and people, by humiliation, confession, contrition, and prayer seek that Satan may be stripped of his power, and that the word of God may have free course: and this period of the church's history shall be a memorable one, not only in our experience, but in the annals of eternity.

But Jesus utters here not only the language of rebuke but of complaint. "How long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?" How long? For how many years shall your unbelief endure? What appliances will it resist? How long has this scandal and source of weakness rested upon you? Shall this slumberous spirit, the dull ear, and the closed eye endure, till it terminate in death. It is high

time for you to awake out of sleep. The day wears apace and the night is coming on—the long dark night in which no man can work. Many years of this brief uncertain pilgrimage of ours are reckoned now with the past. Their sins and negligences cannot now be repaired. But now let us redeem the time. There is much to do and but a brief period in which do it. Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds and watch unto prayer. Jesus complains against you in irrepressible grief and trouble of soul, complains in the ear of the Father, as the prophet of old did. “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed.” He complains of you as he did of that faithless generation to whom he personally preached.

Coming forth, as he now did, from the inaccessible light—from the glory which encompassed him on the Mount—and from the blessed and holy converse he had enjoyed there, he feels his spirit more than usually chafed and troubled, for he has come down truly into a vale of tears, and to the contemplation of Satan’s work and power among the children of men, and to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself, and the unbelief of Israel, and, above all, the unbelief of his own disciples. During his brief absence it seems as if his long, toilsome work had been destroyed, and he has forthwith to begin it anew. It is most natural, therefore, that what he now utters should bear the stamp of holy indignation, coupled with deep compassion, and moreover almost of impatient earnestness to reach the goal which he had just been so near upon the Mount, the place, namely, of rest and of glory. It is hard for him to bear this unbelief—hard to his fervent love, which seeks only faith to call forth the power and to manifest the glory of God—hard to his holy and righteous spirit to bear their perversity, the mistrust, and the guileful spirit of men—so hard that

he cannot be silent. “How long shall I be with you, labouring thus in vain—performing this hopeless labour of filling a vessel which immediately empties itself, seeing ye do not yet believe? How long shall I suffer you?”

How pregnant these words come from the lips of Jesus! That unbelief—that perversity—these sins and that slowness of heart are all a burden laid upon me, the sin-bearer. Why should you make that burden so intolerably heavy, by closing your hearts in unbelief? In us and in them this unbelief is a serious evil—the root of all evils. When the Spirit comes into the world, his first work is to convince it of the sin of unbelief, for where this is done the foundation of the throne of iniquity is overthrown. Without faith it is impossible to please God. In how far does unbelief cleave to us? By it we are ever crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to open shame. We obscure his glory, and limit the grace and power of his kingdom. We wound Christ in the house of his friends. How great an evil, and how shameful and inexcusable is unbelief—to distrust him who came to seek and to save the lost—to assume our burdens and carry our sins—who, when we were without strength, died for the ungodly. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, but when we were sinners, and consequently enemies, he died for us. With an ever-gracious voice he solicits us to trust him—shews us the wounds he has received in his bloody conflict that we may trust him—invites us to cast all our burdens, and cares, and sins upon him, he being willing and able to bear them all, and to save to the very uttermost all that come to God through him. Let us then this day make heaven itself glad by receiving this word of the Lord, and let us satisfy Jesus by his seeing of the travail of his soul. Let our cry be, “I believe, help thou mine unbelief,” and health



will begin to circulate in all our veins, our moral paralysis will have ceased, and in the vigour and beauty of a renovated life, we shall yet go forth to conquer, and Satan shall tremble at the word of the Lord, and shall shortly be bruised under our feet.

#### § 5. THE CASE TAKEN UP BY JESUS.

Blessed be God that, amid man's weakness and helplessness, the Lord is omnipotent. From him cometh again the quickening power. When he returns to his people, and in his gracious presence, their confidence is restored. On this occasion, and in his absence, the church had felt her helplessness, and men stood looking to one another in vain. The parent looked to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude, and faith came not, nor power; but each rather slackened the hands of the others, and faith died, and the work of God remained undone. But now the Lord himself comes. They have now another object to which to look. That grieved parent, with some beginnings of trustfulness, recites his mournful tale, and hope begins to spring up in the sunken hearts of the baffled disciples, and the multitude look on in expectation. Then comes the command of Jesus, "Bring him hither to me"—him who so needs my help. Bring him only to me.

This is the one thing to be done under all various circumstances. Faith would have done that long ago. It is a revived faith that must now do it. Thus the complaint of their unbelief, and the command which Jesus now gives, stand so closely associated. This fact teaches us a pregnant lesson. For faith is but the instrument for laying hold on Christ. It has no inherent virtue or energy. It accom-

plishes all things just because Christ is, where there is faith. Faith embraces him, and he is at hand. Thus though he was absent in body on the Mount, had there been but faith, Christ, in his gracious power, would have been with the disciples, and the devil would have been cast out. Christ is but doing now, what his disciples should have done then. "Bring him hither to me."

Faith does this office still, and hence its unabated power. Yes, in all ages, it is in vain to contend against the powers of evil, otherwise. Parents in their affectionate anxiety and devotedness will labour in vain, they will have recourse to ministers in vain, and the work of God will be arrested in their families. There is no help in man whose breath is in his nostrils. Our help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. Bring, says Jesus, bring that afflicted one to me; bear him on the strong arm of faith to the mercy seat. Jesus is speaking this word still from his throne of power. Whatever spiritual malady, then, affects us or ours, let us bring them to Christ and spread out the case before him. The faith whereby we appropriate and lay hold on him assures us that he is present with us to hear our cry, and will be to us, as he always has been, a refuge and strength, a very present help in every time of trouble. This is what we eminently need to realise,—a Christ living and present with us—not a record of one who was and has passed away; but him who is as truly and graciously with his people as when, in visible form, he tabernacled with men on the earth. The fact is really so. It is only we who want faith to apprehend it. All is lost to us if we make shipwreck of this faith. All blessings are ours in the possession and exercise of it.

The word of Jesus is obeyed. The possessed child is brought into his presence, doubtless with all alacrity; the

scribes meanwhile standing looking on in dubious wonder—the father moved by his deep parental affection—the disciples and the multitude waiting in earnest expectation, not without hope, to witness a successful issue of this conflict between the powers of light and darkness. This evil spirit has already manifested a most unwonted power. As he has set at naught the command of the disciples, will he be able to resist that of Jesus? Whatever the multitude may think, the devil already knows the issue. One has only to look on the combatants to see which of them is possessed of the most conscious power. Jesus stands calmly waiting the arrival of the unhappy child, disturbed by no anxious foreboding as to the issue of this conflict. Amid that eager assembly, in the face of scornful unbelievers, he is without trepidation, self-possessed, waiting to put forth his majestic power. The evil spirit presents a picture precisely the reverse. In the presence of Jesus, while he rages, he displays his weakness. The spirit tore the unhappy child, and he fell on the ground and wallowed foaming. One of his severest fits has come on, realising to the full, the painful description which his father had given of his distemper. The spirit which vexed him knows that his time is short, and if he must quit this human habitation, he will first do it all the damage he can.

This is a symbolic scene, a picture of what takes place in the history and progress of the kingdom of grace. When the church has become powerless through the want of faith, and is yielding herself too much to worldly influences, and sinks into heavy slumber, Satan then also appears to be at rest—puts forth no visible and powerful effort to secure and prostrate his victims—does not put forth his hand to vex the church. The time of active persecution, of the awakening

of the cruel spirit of evil, is always contemporaneous with a religious revival. When Jesus comes forth in the power of the Spirit to deliver souls, then Satan also rages because his time is short. Then start up into full and energetic life at once both the powers of good and of evil. The devil, who seemed to repose, takes full possession of his servants and children, and directs their forces against the children of God.

And what takes place in the open field of the world and in the public history of the church, is taking place continually within the domain of the soul itself. Every effort of the believer after higher attainments in grace, is met and counteracted by a corresponding effort of evil in the opposite direction. The quickening of the soul into spiritual life quickens also the dormant passions over which Satan holds his sway. Not without a conflict and stout resistance is any advance made. Every accession of grace is a victory over evil. The pangs of travail—the excitement of fierce, opposing passions, accompany the new birth. When Satan's head is to be bruised, he bruises always the heel of his adversary. When the soul is brought, as this child was, into the actual presence of Jesus, the devil re-enacts the same part, and will not let go his prey without a struggle.

And so it is throughout the history of the Christian life. That life is to fight a good fight—to endure hardness as a good soldier—it is a series of conflicts, disasters, and victories, till the final victory be won, and the unfading crown be put on. The devil tears those whom he can no longer employ.

Jesus does not immediately interpose to cast out the evil spirit. He will do his work with the calm majesty which becomes him, and by his own calmness he will quiet the hearts of those who are looking on. He does not go to work hurriedly and passionately, as if he were afraid that the evil

spirit would do such deadly mischief to his victim as to place him beyond the reach of his gracious help. He knows the power of Satan, and his own, and can afford to let him vent his impotent wrath. He looks on the piteous spectacle before him with a compassionate heart, and enters into that parent's horror and grief, and yet he utters not the commanding word. He has something to do first with that father himself. It is needful for the reception of the blessing that there should be faith in him who partakes of it. He sets himself, therefore, to enkindle this faith, but he adopts a way of doing it which could scarcely have occurred to human wisdom. He brings first before the father's mind the obstinate character of this distemper. He asks him not merely to look to the dreadful nature of the disease as it is now manifested, but to its long continuance and its always painful symptoms and effects. "How long is it ago," he says, "since this came unto him?" The father answers, "of a child." He has been so from his very infancy. And then, as if to show that the question of Jesus has served its purpose, in bringing before the father's mind the malignity of the distemper, he adds again, "And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire and into the water to destroy him." Having thus vividly before his mind the whole melancholy history of his son, he cries, "*if thou canst* do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Like the Syrophenician woman, in his strong parental affection he identifies his son's case with his own, "Help *us—me* as well as that helpless foaming victim of Satan's power. His sore trouble has entered into my soul and made it mine also—in seeing him suffer I bear his trouble. Have compassion on us—help us."

Take courage, O loving father, and learn to qualify that doubting *if* which thou hast uttered. Already thou hast been taught two grand lessons, which may help thee farther



on in thy course. Thou hast learned that the only help for thee lies here. Thou hast come at last to make thine appeal to the right quarter—an appeal so earnest because it is the last. All hope must be extinguished if thou failest here. This is not one among many remedies and resources—thou knowest it to be the only one.

This is one grand lesson thou hast learned. The other is in that word *us*—in the identification of thy case with thy son's. Thou hast become a bearer of thy son's burdens, and feelest his trouble as if it were thine own. Thou hast come now to the burden-bearer, who hath invited thee to cast thy burden upon him. Thy fatherly sympathy will help thy faith. What thou couldst not venture to ask for thyself, thou wilt venture to ask for thy child. What thou feelest for him will help thee to understand what Jesus feels for thee, and how he can identify himself with thee, and assume thy burden and relieve thee.

Nor can it fail to occur to every one that we have been here reading a chapter in spiritual history, vividly represented to us in these few facts—

1st, As to the method which the Lord usually adopts in creating and exciting faith. He does not lead us, any more than this unhappy father to trust in him, by inducing us to think lightly of the distemper by which we are affected. In our case, as in his, he directs our thoughts to the deep and obstinate hold which the leprosy of sin has on our nature, and to its terrible and deadly malignity. He brings before our minds all the revolting facts which attest the virulence of the disease, and shows us how incurable it is. And this conviction of sin just operates in the redeemed, as the fact of his son's distemper operated in this father, and brings us to plead earnestly with Christ. It may be that we have been trying far other remedies, hoping that our

disease would disappear in the course of nature, or trying the effect of various human agencies ; but at last we come to the feet of Jesus, and we come there as to our final resource, convinced, at least, that if deliverance is not found there it is to be found nowhere. We may not yet be fully persuaded that Jesus is able or willing to deliver us, but we are resolute at least to try. If we must perish, we will perish, there, pleading at the foot of the cross.

And, 2d, it is often felt what a quickening power it gives to our supplications, how much it helps both our faith and our earnestness, when we have to plead not our own cause only, but that of others also. The *us* has an influence with others, as with this man. And thus we find that when Jesus gave an example of closet prayer to his disciples, he taught them to say *our* Father—to carry with them to the throne of grace the concerns of others as well as their own—to unite themselves thus to the church and to its head. And when we have not faith enough to be sure that Christ will take our burden and relieve us personally, we gather strength to plead with him, when we are casting upon him the care of those who are dear to us. If it be true that the love for our brethren which would induce us earnestly to pray for them, and to identify ourselves with them, springs out of the antecedent love of God manifested to us, it is equally true that by our love of our brethren we not only attest, but mightly strengthen our love of God and our confidence in him. The faith which would have failed the Syrophenician pleading for herself, was sustained and strengthened in pleading for her daughter. The faith of this man, so weak that he could hardly use it, grows into power as he pleads for his son.

And now observe that Jesus meets the pleading father's *if*, with an *if* equally emphatic of his own—an *if* revealing

fearfully to him the fact that the continuance of his son's distemper lay at his own door—that there was relief from this calamity if he would only ask and receive it. But had he not been asking—was he not ready to receive? In a certain sense he had been doing so. He had been asking, earnestly pleading, but it was with a kind of blind instinct of despair, unthinkingly, as a man in a passion of grief might ask his child back from the insensate grave—as a man complains to dumb nature when he is overwhelmed with sorrow—as a starving man might ask riches at the hand of a beggar—not, indeed, in mockery, but under the impulse of irrepressible anguish. When we ask anything intelligently, and apart from mere passion at the hands of any one, we ask of those who have it to give. But yet it is this very thing regarding which this man is doubtful—his *if* has reference to the power of Jesus—“*if* thou canst do anything.” There is deep cause, then, for Jesus making him pause and consider. Jesus gives him no denial, and does not turn away from his impious doubting. He doubts whether Jesus can do anything, and Jesus carries him back again to the disease of his own heart. “*If* thou canst believe.” The hindrance lies there, not in the power and malignity of this devil in thy son, but in the power and malignity of sin in thee. Thou art a foolish seeker to come to one who is unable to give. Thou hast not yet truly and intelligently asked help for thy son, unless thou comest to ask of him who *can* help and save. After what thou hast seen and heard, canst thou not believe? “All things are possible to him that believeth.”

It cost this man a struggle, as the same thing may have cost some of us. The evil spirit is tearing and tormenting visibly his hapless victim, and he is equally busy, though unseen, at the father's heart. He had found it easy to ask

but he finds it difficult to believe. And yet really the two acts are involved in each other. Has it not been so often times with us? Prayer becomes a habit, a custom, a kind of daily necessity, a method of relieving the mind. But how much true asking is there—how much faith? Alas, we do not often come even the length of realising this father's *if*—our confessions and petitions are uttered, but not felt, and when they have been uttered they are no more cared for. This man had at least a more thorough earnestness. That afflicted son of his was ever in his eye. There was no relief for him till there was relief for his son. He waited and pressed for an answer, and therefore came the question and doubt regarding the power of Christ—if thou canst. It was of little importance to him merely to tell his grief, his concern was to get it turned into joy. Suppose, then, that we put ourselves to this test. I apprehend we would experience the same trouble about our faith. We come, let us say, to a throne of grace, with some conscious sin pressing upon us—burdening our soul. We come to confess that sin. It is so far well. It is like this father giving a statement of his son's torment. But then is this all? This father had done all this, yet notwithstanding his son is still wrestling in his agony. Nothing will satisfy him but the deliverance of his son. And, should anything less satisfy us? What do we mean by that confession, by bringing our sin to a throne of grace? Is it not that we ask Christ to take it and make it his own? The sin cannot be annihilated, it must lie somewhere, either upon Christ, or upon us. In the act of confession, then, we must have a personal dealing with Christ—with the efficacy of his atoning blood. What actually, then, is the character of our confession?—is it merely pouring out the complaint of a burdened heart, as in the case of this father? In the first instance, are we able

to cast our burden on Christ? and have we the faith that he will deliver us, and make that burden his own? In such close personal dealing with Jesus would we not often find room for an *if—if thou canst—if thou wilt?* Oh what strength of faith do we need in order to make a right confession, to offer one intelligent petition, and to wait its fulfilment!

This father felt that truth, when he began to sound the depths of his unbelief. He now cries, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." For the first time now, when this man really believes, he feels himself to be an unbeliever. He had never fully thought of it before—had never clearly perceived what an evil heart of unbelief there was in him. Hitherto he had had no standard whereby to measure his deficiency. Now, when he is struggling to believe that Christ can and will heal, and when he has really obtained the victory—when he recognizes the presence and power of the Lord, and the fulness of that grace which is in him—when he is able really to make over this heavy burden to Jesus, and with a full heart to say, I believe, he perceives by this light what profound darkness there is yet within—what depths of unbelief there are still in his soul, to be eradicated by the divine light.

Jesus has now made the case to him strictly a personal, and not a relative one. When he came to this interview with the Lord, he was unconscious of any want except in the desire to be quit of the harassing grief which was his, through the affliction of his child. But now he has passed into a new sphere of knowledge. As he begins to apprehend the power and grace of Christ, he perceives that his child's distemper is not the only thing which ought to trouble him—that there is a sore trouble and plague in his own soul—a distrust of the Lord, a covert enmity to him,



a spiritual estrangement and death—his cry is now for the removal of this, “ Help mine unbelief.” Not, indeed, that he forgets the case of his son, for he now knows that it is through the instrumentality of his own faith, that deliverance must come to his child; but he equally wants deliverance for himself—the capacity of simply trusting in the Lord—of giving credit to his testimony. He perceives that it is truly the greatest and most presumptuous of all sins to be an unbeliever, to meet all the divine promises and revelations with a secret denial, and so to call God a liar. This surely is to be delivered over into the bondage of Satan, and to consummate the rebellion of the heart and mind against God. But now, at last, he has got into a right position—he is a believer, complaining of his unbelief, and looking for help to the author and finisher of faith.

Let this also be our position. Can we go so far as this deeply humbled man? Can we truly say as in the presence of Jesus, “ Lord, I believe?” Have we obtained such an apprehension of the grace of Christ, of his nearness and power, as to be able to make over to him the burden that oppresses us, believing that he will take it and bear both us and it? Have we come to this close personal dealing with the Lord? If so, we, for the first time, will cry with this man, “ help our unbelief.” We will perceive what distrust, what want of confidence is in our hearts—how we have been borne down to the dust, and made slaves of sin, because of this unbelief. How hard it is for us to trust Christ for every thing, and to cast all our care upon him! The believer feels it to be so, for it is true of faith as of all other graces, that the possession of it, in a certain measure, reveals our destitution. And thus it is that the more gracious a believer is, the more sensible he becomes of his poverty, the more humble and earnest in his seeking. It is here, at

the hands of Jesus, that this need is to be supplied. We shall not wait here in vain. As we look up to Jesus, we shall grow into a more full apprehension, of him in whom all fulness dwells, and in that apprehension, we will not only grow into a more perfect knowledge of our wants, but our hungry souls shall be satisfied with good things.

#### § VI. THE EVIL SPIRIT CAST OUT.

It may be profitable at this point to recapitulate in a few words the leading facts of this history, and the lessons which it is designed and fitted to teach.

1st, We have had manifested to us the root of unbelief as hindering the manifestation of the gracious power of God, and as securing and perpetuating the dominion of Satan. This is not an isolated fact, but a universal one, realized once and again in the personal history of Jesus, and ever recurring in the whole history of the Christian church. To believe is always to be strong, to be faithless is to be overcome of evil. A church works and triumphs according to the measure of her faith, because this is the bond of union between her and Christ. And the history of the individual Christian is identical with that of the church in the sources of his strength, and the secret of his weakness. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, and there is no other possibility of victory for us; because Christ himself is the agent of power, who rides forth prosperously because of meekness, and truth, and righteousness; and faith both indicates and assures his presence. He who filleth all things *is*, wherever there is faith to apprehend him, and puts forth his might to bruise the serpent's head.

2d, Our attention has been directed to the revival and restoration of faith, and the means taken to effect it. These, in the case recorded in the text, and in every case, are radically the same. These means are threefold—1st, The conviction of sin; 2d, The manifestation of Christ; 3d, The renewal of the will. In the history of this man seeking the aid of Christ, there is just effected what is described as taking place in our effectual calling, namely the conviction of sin and misery, the enlightening of the mind in the knowledge of Christ, the renewal of the will, and the ability to embrace Christ as he is revealed in the gospel. Jesus directs this man first of all to the malignant and obstinate character of the distemper he wishes to be removed, and then he stands there manifested as the divine agent who alone can remove it. This being done, Jesus indicates the root of evil within the man himself, and removes it. As standing apart from Christ, he shews him that there is no hope of a remedy. He and the deliverer must be made one. He must surrender himself to the will and power of Christ, not now desiring freedom merely from the burden which has oppressed him, that he might be more free to serve himself, but desiring to put himself unreservedly into the hands of Christ, henceforth to be his. To this demand the man yields himself, and is persuaded and enabled to embrace Christ. He has become a believer. It is thus always in the history of the soul. 1. A sight of sin. 2. The revelation of Jesus Christ. 3. Not merely the making over the burden of our sin, but ourselves also, with that burden, to the Lord, and then Christ is ours when we have become his.

3d, We have adverted also, to the state and consciousness of the sinner when he has embraced Christ, as indicated in this man's prayer and confession, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." It is when he has made himself

over to Christ that he begins to perceive the extent of the treason, distrust, and infidelity which are in his heart. In thoroughly trusting him in one thing, he perceives his need of trusting him in all things, and how thoroughly estranged he has become. It is in this attitude the man stands, when Jesus puts forth his power and performs this miracle.

In adverting to the miracle itself, we have to consider—1st, The circumstances immediately attendant on the deliverance effected; 2d, Its cause; and 3d, Its nature and results.

1st, The circumstances are thus described to us. “The spirit cried and rent him sore and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said he is dead.” At first, at the very approach of Jesus, the spirit had manifested this cruel malignity. The victim of his power and malice had been lying foaming at the feet of Jesus quite helpless, in those strong nervous convulsions which it is so painful to witness. Now again, when his power and residence there are to be discontinued for ever, he again rends his victim, and leaves him utterly prostrate, and like one dead. Such is the description of the case.

It is profoundly suggestive of many spiritual truths. For we are to bear in mind that here there were at work, on this poor human soul and body, those two spiritual agents which are still and ever working in the church. They are here displaying to us their respective natures as well as their relative powers. The evil spirit is acting according to his nature and habits, and Jesus is manifesting here the abiding grace of his character. The conflict between the powers of good and evil, between Christ and Satan, are still, even as then, often attended with circumstances which, if not identical, are yet quite analogous, and we should not be surprised when we find them realised in experience. It

is true that now we have not the same visible manifestation of the antagonist powers as then—Christ is not visibly and bodily present, and we have not cases placed under our daily observation of actual demoniac possession. But it is not on that account the less true that there is a real presence of Christ and a real casting out of Satan in every case in which deliverance from his dominion is wrought. Thus, then, in the case of every emancipated soul, we might expect the actual manifestation of this malice and rage of Satan—if not so visibly displayed, at least taking place within the domain of the soul itself—Satan, as it were, rending that tabernacle from which he is constrained to depart, and leaving it a prostrate ruin. We are far indeed from affirming that, in every case of conversion, the same violent and exhausting conflict will take place, but we should not marvel though it does.

Observe that in this case the fact is strongly brought out that the possession had been long continued. From infancy Satan had continued to work his will on the afflicted and agonised body of this only son of a sorrowing father, who had been long seeking a remedy in vain. This is a material fact in the whole history of the case, and embodies a solemn lesson. In the body politic, and in the history of nations, how rarely does it occur that an inveterate distemper which has pervaded the whole system can be eradicated without such convulsions and revolutions as tear it in pieces, reduce it for a season to anarchy, and leave it almost destitute of organic life. There are few nations which have not experienced those volcanic heavings and throes which precede and accompany their emancipation from rooted evils. It has been so still more characteristically in the reformation which the church has undergone. It is here that the dominion of Satan is most directly assailed, and it



is here, therefore, that he more conspicuously displays his malice. From the time of Christ and the apostles till now, every great deliverance achieved for the church has been with convulsions—with manifold sufferings and martyrdoms. When the old leaven was to be cast out of the church of God by the advent and work of Christ, what malignity of Satan did this reformation provoke!—what convulsions attended its purgation!—how surely were emancipated souls doomed to be torn asunder—to be afflicted and tormented—to be so misused and prostrated that men thought them and their cause dead, and reckoned them the offscourings of all things! The evil spirit, indeed, was not in these martyred saints to tear and torment them, but he was in, and guiding the body politic of which they were members, and through its agency vexed and harassed them.

So was it at the era of the Reformation, here and elsewhere. The long reign of darkness did not quietly yield itself to the diffusion of the light. The souls who were delivered from Satan's yoke had a deadly conflict to maintain—manifestly their emancipation was wrought out in spite of Satan, and provoked his deepest malice. He could not but again display his violence, and the malignity of his anger, when he again met that Mighty One who is stronger than he, riding forth in his majestic power and diffusing grace from his lips.

And what takes place in the wide domain of church history is but a representation of the less noticeable circumstances which occur in the history of individual conversions. Outwardly or inwardly—in some form more or less observable—this struggle takes place in the emancipation of a soul long under Satan's sway. There may be, and doubtless there are, souls sanctified even from the mother's womb, who grow up into the full development of the Christian life

almost without a struggle—at least without that violent conflict and battle between death and life which the text describes to us. But when Satan has long retained an absolute possession of his victim—when the infidelity of the heart has become rooted and obstinate—when evil habits have become inveterate—then, if deliverance come at all, it will be through a death struggle. There will be this tearing and prostration by the malice of Satan.

How often, indeed, do we notice in such cases, as here, a twofold stage in the vexation of the devil. First, this possessed one is tormented when he is carried near to Jesus, and then again when he hears the resistless command to depart. So in those cases when Christ, though unseen as yet, is really drawing near to them, they are laid prostrate by some sore distemper, bringing them near the gates of death—or some sad desolation comes upon their household—or the gourd under which they had been sitting is withered. These indeed prove instruments, as well as accompaniments, of their being brought near to Christ—within sight of him; but through them, not the less, does Satan display both his power and malice. This violent access of the child's distemper doubtless wrought even thus, in the case before us, in giving a greater intensity and depth to the earnest pleading of the father. For Satan, after all, is neither so wise nor so powerful as Jesus Christ, and his malignity is often the occasion of the soul's deliverance. But the conflict is not ended by these preliminary convulsions, which so tear and shake to pieces the security in which the man may have been dwelling. After the soul is brought into the presence of Jesus, and becomes conscious of that presence—is, in fact, looking to him for deliverance, and waiting for it in faith—there is a new and desperate struggle. Satan quits his hold reluctantly. There was a struggle here in both the father and

the son. And so the deliverances still effected are accompanied with a fresh and more desperate conflict—coming, perhaps, in the accumulation of fresh woes and disasters, such as those which of old fell upon the head of Job, or in quite as desperate and afflictive a contest against rooted habits and corruptions, to extinguish which seems almost like the extinction of the soul itself.

There are those, I doubt not, who may read these pages, who, for a longer or shorter period, have been looking forward to some expected convenient season for passing through this experience—for escaping from the thralldom of Satan into the light, and liberty, and peace of the children of God. O infatuated and blind, do you not see that thus you are preparing for yourselves a frightful misery! Without looking at present to the extreme improbability that this deliverance will ever in your experience be achieved at all—if you are content ever to postpone the actual effecting of it—does not the constitution of your nature, all the facts of history, and all Scripture testimony, bear witness to you, that if you are to be delivered, it must be with the throes of a fearful anguish, by being rent asunder, and brought even to the verge of death? You can tear up a sapling, and transplant it to a more kindly soil, and scarcely a leaf will wither, and its growth will not be sensibly impeded. But root up a full-grown tree, however tenderly and carefully, and, if you preserve its life at all, it will present to you for a season its leafless branches, and appear as if dead, and every storm will tell upon it with an almost fatal effect, toppling *it* over, while others are but rooted more deeply in the soil, and it rarely acquires the health, and strength, and beauty, of other trees. So is it also in the history of souls. The struggle must be the more protracted and severe the longer the day of battle is postponed, and it is rarely that the aged convert grows into

the healthful vitality and strength of those who have sought and found the Lord early.

Does not the church, in all her operations, recognise this formidable fact? Is she not everywhere, by her acts as well as by articulate words, saying, our hope is in the young. Those who have grown old in the service of sin may as well be let alone. Alas for the church which so speaks, as well as for these hapless victims of Satan! The true church, in so speaking, but echoes indeed the voice of an enlarged experience. It is found to be a fact in her history, that the devil, lodged in a long familiar habitation, refuses to go out at her bidding. It was so in the experience of the first disciples of Jesus, to their great grief and astonishment. Alas for them! alas for us! if we make up our minds that it must be so. All things are possible to him that believeth. This kind indeed cometh not out but by prayer and fasting. But why should these instruments not be plied? Is the church to sit down contented in the front of her most formidable foe, even when he sits within his strongest entrenchments, and confess that, in this or in any case, Satan is more powerful than she—yea than her glorious and risen Lord? God forbid. To yield in any case is really to give up all, and to carry on merely a kind of training, an educational work, which, after all, is merely human, issuing, it may be, in many beautiful human results, but in nothing truly divine. True faith can recognise no difficulties and no impossibilities. The quickening Spirit, which can transform the heart of a little child, can effect the same change on the hoary sinner. The blood which purgeth the conscience of the young disciple, is equally competent to purify the old. Let us only believe. All things are possible to him that believeth. To the church, to us so looking at mere human possibilities, Christ is uttering over again these words.

Shall we not respond to them, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief? If this cry become earnest and real—if it be the result of conscious want—there shall take place in our experience even what was wrought here, and we shall see the devil cast out of his securest strongholds. Not, indeed, it may be, without a protracted and painful conflict. We cannot expect it to be without that. But surely, O sinner, it is better to be tortured and vexed for a season than to be the victim and slave of Satan for ever, and to share his terrible doom. Be not afraid, then, to enter into this strife where death seems to rage. Satan, after all, can but bruise thy heel. His utmost malice is exhausted in that. Christ, to whom thou committest thyself, will keep thee as safe as himself was; and, if calling you to some participation in the fellowship of his sufferings, will give you to know also the power of his resurrection.

2d, But this leads us now to notice, and it must be briefly, the cause of this deliverance. It was the powerful word of Christ, as uttered by himself, "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him." It was this, and nothing else, that effected, or could effect, this wonderful and final deliverance. Contrary to his wont, Jesus here addresses the spirit at some length, in marvellous condescension and love, adapting himself to the condition and state of his hearers, as well as exercising a power over the evil spirit. He puts his command in opposition to the powerless exorcism of the disciples, which had encouraged, and not defeated the devil; and in order to give the most perfect assurance to the father, and the son, and all the hearers, he adds this command to the spirit, which we only find here, that it should depart from him never to return.

This same thing takes place actually in every case in which Satan is dethroned and dispossessed. It is Christ



who does it, and he does it by his word. He commands and Satan must submit. That spirit of evil yields to no other authority or power, save that of him who planted on the head of the serpent his victorious foot. We cannot convert ourselves—we cannot convert others, whether young or old. It is true, indeed, that these disciples of Jesus had gone forth and found that even the devils were subject unto them—in all cases but this these spirits had submitted to their command. But this case which baffled them, occurred in order that they and we might know that this work was effected by no inherent power in them—by no official virtue imparted to them—but simply because Christ was in and with them, through that faith in which they laboured, and spoke, and prayed. And even so it is throughout the history of the church. The one cause of deliverance is Christ. He is the Saviour, and no other. He subdues Satan, and no other. But then he is as truly present, and as powerful to do this kind of work now as he was then. By his word, still spoken in faith, Satan, however reluctantly, relinquishes his usurped dominion. He loves souls as well as ever—he is as intent as ever on destroying the works of the devil. He will not, indeed, give his glory to another, and he stamps with vanity and feebleness that agency which refuses to own and to work with him. But against all foes he is sufficient, and his victory is final and complete. Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shall we not seek to take up and re-echo this song of praise, which is so melodious in the ear of heaven? Of ourselves and of others shall we not seek to say it? Take courage, O believer, as thou criest and contendest against thine unbelief. Thou hast, indeed, many foes, powerful, and skilful, and malicious. Thou art standing on a battlefield strewn

with the dead who have fallen around thee. Thou art in the deadly region of the Upas tree, and feelest, perhaps, its baleful poison circulating through thy veins, and inducing upon thee that fatal sleep which ends in death. Mountains and deep red seas lie in thy way, and wildernesses without food—yet despair not. He who is the Captain of salvation goes before thee, and is thy rereward—he who speaks and it is done. Sleep not but on his loving breast—go to battle under his banner, and girt with his armour. Water will spring out of the flinty rock for thee—the mountains will be levelled, and the seas divided, and crooked things will be made straight for thee. Only be strong and of a good courage. Thy weary soul desires rest. Behold, instead of rest there is victory, and an immortal crown.

And shall we not seek to win that crown also in the open field of the world—in this very work of casting out Satan from the souls of perishing men? He who is doing this grand work in me, can do it also in them. My own deliverance is to me the pledge and assurance of this gracious power. If salvation be not possible for these, how could it have been wrought in me? To cast out Satan from these is as easy as it was to dethrone him in my own soul. And to this work Christ calls me as his disciple.

3d, This, however, leads us to notice the results of this miracle. These we shall find in the conversation of Jesus with his disciples after the miracle has been wrought. “Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, because of your unbelief, for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” The dis-

ciples do not care to mention the difficulty which still perplexed them, in the presence of the multitude. They take Jesus, therefore, apart to ask him how it happened that they were unable to cast out this evil spirit. It is evident that they are yet very slow to understand. They have not rightly gathered up the meaning of what Jesus had spoken, both to the father of the victim and to the multitude, else they would have found that their question had been already answered. The truth which he had spoken to these parties was also a truth for them. But their minds had been seeking a solution of the mystery in far other directions. As almost always happens, they did not expect to find the cause of their failure in themselves. There were many other quarters in which it was possible to seek it. This might be a spirit more powerful than any they had hitherto encountered, or the fault might lie in the son, or in the father who sought their help. Jesus at once undeceives them. It was your unbelief that disabled you. The same sin and weakness which I have reproved in others belongs also to you. Had you believed there would have been no failure, for faith is always armed with invincible strength. The smallest amount of it is able to accomplish the mightiest works, for by faith the power of God is called into exercise. That mountain shall shift its place at your bidding, and all things shall be obedient to your word. Nothing shall be to you impossible, even as there is nothing impossible unto God. His omnipotence is in the hand of faith. It elevates you to the place where he stands, and empowers you to do the works which are only proper to him. It identifies you with the all-powerful.

This is ever the attribute and province of faith. What Jesus says the smallest measure of it could accomplish then, it is able to accomplish still. Can faith, then, work

miracles in our day, as it did in apostolic times? The answer to this question is, that faith can do whatever Jesus in the position of the believer would choose to do. But just because its power lies in the fact of its establishing a union with Jesus, it can and will do nothing which he would not do. He does not choose to perform miracles of that kind now, because the need of them has ceased, but the power of faith is not, on that account, restricted. Nay, it effects greater miracles than these. Jesus here points to what, by faith, could be done in the sphere of external nature, but it is to awaken and strengthen their confidence in what it could accomplish in a far higher sphere. It is a more difficult work to root out a sin from the heart, to dispossess the spirit of evil from the soul in which he has long reigned, than to remove a mountain. God is making this truth manifest in his own manner of working. The work of creation was effected by a word—that of redemption is being accomplished in a long succession of ages. When, by the work of thousands of years, he has prepared his people, the new heavens and the new earth will be transformed for them in a day. Faith does not literally remove mountains, but it has a higher and nobler work. It works for the kingdom of God, and that kingdom is not served and promoted by such marvels. The mountains which it removes are those which sin has raised in the human heart. These are not equally obedient to the heavenly voice, as Lebanon and Hermon. These mountains stand where God placed them. The spirits of evil are in open rebellion against him. To remove a mountain, faith as small as a grain of mustard seed is sufficient. To expel the spirit of evil is a harder task. To effect this great work we need fasting and prayer. These sustain faith. By them the mustard seed is nourished and expanded into the growth of a tree, and it becomes able to

remove that mountain which lies in our way—that evil, however deep-seated, which impedes our course. He who lives in true prayer must needs live in faith, and if we are found praying in connection with any work of God we have to do, it will be seen how surely that work will prosper. All things are possible to him that believeth.

#### § VII. RETIREMENT AND MEDITATION.

Jesus had now been for many days in the region of Cesarea Philippi. That was the scene of the remarkable events we have been considering—the scene of this great miracle in which so much divine truth was conveyed—of the glorious transfiguration—of the good confession which the disciples had witnessed, and of the twofold reproof which had been administered to them. It had been a time of solemn conference—a time for the communication to them of profound and far-reaching truths. During these days they had been learning much—receiving deep lessons regarding themselves and the person and work of their Master. It had been to them at once a scene of glory and of humiliation, in which the majesty of the Lord had been revealed, and their own weakness and perversity displayed.

Now these great events are over, and they turn their faces southward again, to come back upon the ground which had been long familiar to them—to the territory within which they had first known Jesus, and where they had witnessed so many of his wonderful works. But when they thus return, it is not to mingle in the busy haunts of men, nor to receive the congratulations of the people. Jesus at once wishes to be in Galilee, and to be alone with his disciples.

1. To this fact, then, let us first of all attend. He is pass-



ing through Galilee, and wills not that any man should know it. Why does he now withdraw himself and them for a season from the busy scenes of their labour? More than once before, indeed, he had done the same thing, though not in precisely the same way, or for the same end. He had on former occasions gone from among the people to escape persecution, or because of their hardened unbelief, or to snatch a brief time of relaxation and refreshment from his incessant and exhausting toil. But then it had always been to some strange unfamiliar place—to the utmost borders of the land, or to some lone mountain to pray. In every case he was teaching high and enduring lessons to the disciples—whether leading them into the recesses of the presence chamber of God, and shewing them how to take refuge from the storms and plagues of time under the wings of the Almighty, or, as if longing to break beyond the bounds of the limited sphere of his personal labour, and to reveal his grace to the nations of the earth. On the one hand he was shewing them where to get strength for their work; or, on the other, not obscurely intimating how extensive that work was to be.

Now, however, it is different. He had been on the Gentile border, there laying the foundations of that empire which was to be universal and endless, and revealing his glory on the mountain, whence its light might be reflected on the lands both of Jew and Gentile. He returns back from that border land, and, in the heart of Galilee, wishes to be alone. Luke reveals to us the reason of this fact. As they were leaving the scene of such marvels, wrapped in wonder at what they had witnessed and heard, entering somewhat into the apprehension of their own nothingness, and of the power and majesty of the Lord, he says to them, “Let these sayings sink down into your ears”—these which

you have now heard—these which I have been teaching you from the first. It is a time for the solemn review and revision of all that they had seen and heard, and he takes them to that place where they could most vividly recal the scenes of their past intercourse. Every hill, and stream, and valley, and that Sea of Galilee, were instinct with the memorials of the footsteps of Jesus, and had become vocal with his gracious words. There at Cana he had mingled with a festive marriage company—there also he had healed the nobleman's son. In that synagogue at Nazareth he had preached his first sermon, and excited the indignation of its unbelieving people. By the shore of that sea he had called his disciples from their humble occupations to make them fishers of men. In Capernaum, lying peacefully beside the lake, he had had his chief residence, and had filled its streets and houses with the traces of his miraculous power. There, on the declivity of that mountain, he had preached his ever-memorable sermon, a light to them and to all ages and people. On that sea he had walked, and had stilled its wildest waves. It was a land full of sacred memories, and he leads them into it that they might feed on these—that they might look at his deeds and words from the point they had now reached in their history.

And this is not an act of memory merely, but of something higher and better. They recal, indeed, his acts and words, but now they are not the same as before. They see them now in the light of that glory which had shone upon them on the Mount, as the words and deeds of the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. They acquire, in that light, a new meaning and power. At the time they had been objects of wonder ; alas ! how imperfectly understood and

felt. But now they are radiant with the glory of that gracious love of which each of them was an expression. This time of retrospection was what the disciples now specially needed. It was not merely a repetition of a lesson already learned—it was putting them into full possession of what they had only imperfectly acquired. For this end they were now in Galilee, and alone—not acting, but meditating from that lofty stand-point which they had reached. The apprehension and confession of the Christ, and the demonstration of the truth of that confession which they had witnessed on the Mount, invited them to survey the ground they had trodden over, and to gather into their minds and hearts that rich harvest of divine knowledge which they had been gleaning, that they might know how rich, and ripe, and nourishing its fruits were.

Even thus will the Lord have us to act. A time of gracious communication to us is always a fitting time for retrospection ; and this retrospection is, of itself, the occasion and instrument for the ministry of yet more grace. When any striking providence takes place in our personal history, the Lord, by it, is asking us to retire and ponder over the way by which he has led us, and to let these things sink into our ears and hearts. When we experience any refreshing from his presence, and our souls are awakened to gratitude, and love, and praise, he will have us to think of all his sayings ; and how sweet then become to us all his words of truth ! Those chapters and verses of our Bible may have often been read before, and we may have thought we understood them, but how fresh do they now become—how radiant with new light—what a depth of hitherto unperceived meaning they have ! Such a time of retrospection and meditation is a time of true progress, if it be well used. We cannot become profound learners in the school of Christ

without it. We can neither rightly understand our own history nor God's message. It is a time during which are sown the seeds of the future harvest, during which strength is acquired for future victory. Let us seek such seasons of holy meditation, and diligently improve them. Let us seek to restore, revive, and deepen our knowledge of divine things amid those scenes which have been consecrated to us by fellowship with the Lord, and where we have been wont to listen to his voice in his word. They are fitted to be most profitable to us, and especially if we always carry along with us that instruction which Jesus now gives to his disciples.

2. Let us, therefore, notice what that instruction is. Amid all the sayings which he wishes to sink into their ears, there is this one, which alone will harmonize them all, and make them clear as the sunlight, and shed over them the hallowing influence of love. "The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." Here he announces no new truth. It is simply one of the reminiscences which he wishes them to keep before their minds in that season of meditation. It is the only one of his sayings which he here repeats, because he knows that, as yet, they are unaware of its true value, and that it is not yet sweet to their taste. But it is under the shadow of that awful truth he demands that this retrospect should be conducted. These are the facts which he desires should be most deeply engraven on their minds and hearts.

It is important to notice the variations with which the evangelists announce this saying. Matthew says, "The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men." Mark says, "The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men." Luke says, "The Son of Man shall be delivered

into the hands of men." The difference, it will be observed, is twofold—each of the evangelists supplementing the information of the others. 1st, Mark speaks of the delivering as a present fact ; Luke speaks of it as future. 2d, Matthew speaks of his betrayal ; the others merely of his being delivered up. The truth is, that two facts are intended to be conveyed, and hence the reason of this diversity.

1st, There is the fact which is both a present and a future one. The Son of Man *is* delivered up, and *shall* be. As Luke records in the Acts, after the fact of the crucifixion, " Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." This delivering up is an act of God—in it God bestows his gift. In one sense it was an act done when Jesus became man. As the Son of Man he was already delivered up. As yet, however, wicked men had not formally assumed their function in this work. They had not yet laid hands upon him, and therefore Luke speaks of it as yet future. He was already delivered up in the divine purpose—he was not yet delivered up in fact, till men had seized and slain him.

2d, There is a betrayal as well as a delivering up. God did not betray him, this was man's wicked work. God gave him over into the hands of men. It was a man who betrayed him into the hands of his enemies. And this betrayal could not, in its nature, be the work of open and professed enemies. It must be the act of a pretended friend. An open enemy is not a traitor—he wears the guise of friendship—is a subject of that kingdom which he seeks to overthrow. Here, then, new and darker tints are diffused over a picture which already was gloomy enough. The fact of his violent bloody death was not to be the work of the scribes and chief priests alone. It was a mysterious purpose of God,



and it was to be brought about by the hands of a traitor. Yet in that picture there is one gleam of light to render it attractive. "He shall rise the third day." This Jesus is destined to be at once the victim and the conqueror of death. He is to suffer, and yet to triumph—to pass through the portals of the grave, but only to set them open, and thus to proclaim his victory. This is not for them a theme of despair and sorrow. And yet they so used it. They understood not that saying, and hence they were exceeding sorry. It was to them a meditation casting its dark shadow over all their other thoughts. Yet in itself it was the very theme which gave interest and significance to all that they had seen of, and heard from, Jesus.

Let us consider it in some of its manifold bearings.

1. The death, as proclaiming the sin of man and his redemption. For death is the wages of sin. He who sins not cannot die. But Jesus had no personal sin. His death, then, declared him to be a propitiation—a victim—a sacrifice—the one sacrifice, the blood of which purgeth the conscience from dead works. It is a death in the sight of which I am ever to read the fact of my own sin, and the terrible retribution it has deserved. It is the first and most prominent thing to be carried by me into the quiet retirement of religious meditation. It gives its tone and colour to all my other thoughts. It is the truth which illuminates and renders pregnant with meaning the whole revelation of God to me—which at once harmonizes and explains all the divine sayings. It is the truth which at once humbles and exalts me. Let me engage in this work of retrospection apart from this truth, and it becomes not only profitless but deceitful. I can neither read myself, nor God's word aright without it. I must have my eye on the cross if I am to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. I must

meditate, there, if I am to know where and what I am. To me, apart from this, meditation, if it carry me into the region of my own purposes and deeds, is full of danger. I am fain to hide from myself the most painful features of my character. I long to bring into prominence that which has at least the appearance of being good and praiseworthy. I have not courage, save as looking to a pierced Saviour, to face my own sins, to estimate them, to judge of them, to think of their malignity, and of their desert. And with the same evil eye I read the word of God. I bring into prominence its proclamations of mercy and love. I shrink from looking into its threats and curses. My retrospection thus in every way deceives me. I must have this truth of Christ's death before me, coming up alongside of every fact and word, entering into them all as a vivifying power. Then my meditation makes me humble, while it gives me strength and peace. Then, while my retrospection carries me deep into the mysteries of my own nature, and brings all its aspirations, and thoughts, and deeds, into contact with the word of God, it at once condemns and justifies me—shows me how poor I am, and yet how rich—carries me out of myself, and sets me to rest in the bosom of Jesus Christ—fills me with self-aborrence, and yet with grateful and adoring love—cuts down with the sword of the Spirit the budding germs of iniquity in my soul, and applies to my broken and bleeding heart the balm which alone can heal.

2. There was a betrayal unto death. The traitor was an apostle. He held the place of treasurer in the little company of disciples. He had all the outward marks of a faithful man, and wore his disguise so well that no eye detected him, save his only who knew what was in man. This also is a most profitable truth to carry with me when

I retire to meditate and to ponder over the past. I have been calling myself a disciple of Jesus Christ, and have been actually doing the work of one. I have been separated from the common outfield of the world. I have joined the company of believers. I have been sitting at the feet of Jesus, hearing his word. I have been brought into the closest contact with him. I have been honoured to sit at his table; nay, I may have been sent to bear his gracious message to other men. I may have prophesied in his name, and cast out devils. I have not been entirely an idler, uttering the Lord's name, and doing none of his work. I have been labouring and giving of my substance for the promotion of his cause. Am I therefore to infer that all is well with me? Judas was all this, and yet he became a traitor, and hanged himself, and went to his own place. My retrospection must evidently embrace other things than these—my examination must have a more ample scope. I must go to this meditation, in the vivid knowledge and remembrance that my heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. I must watch against this deceit, and pray that the Lord would unveil it to me. I must ask him to search me, and subject myself to his judgment, looking not only to what I have done and said, but to the spirit in which I have acted and spoken. I must ask what love I have to him and to his service, what hatred of sin, and what perception of it in myself. I must dare to be honest, that I may escape the guilt and damnation of becoming a traitor, alike to myself and to Christ. And where and how shall I gain the courage to do this, but at the foot of the cross? Judas fled shrinking from the death of which he was the instrument. When the hour of darkness was coming on, the time of predicted suffering and death, he joined what seemed to be the strongest party, and sold the master he

professed to love. To avoid his destiny, I must live within sight of the cross, and must glory in it, because by it the world is crucified to me and I to the world.

3. There was a delivering up of Christ. This was the royal act of the Father. And this truth also I must carry with, and keep before me in all my meditation. This love of the Father in the gift of his Son—how deep it is, how ineffable! How rich the gift, how unworthy the objects of it! The holy one loving sinners, with a supreme and everlasting love. The Almighty ruler, loving rebels and interposing to save them. The just one loving the unjust. Manifold wisdom, harmonizing mercy and truth, in the gift and sacrifice of the only begotten. He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for us all. With such a truth accepted, believed, engraven on my heart, oh how sweet to my taste must all his words and counsels become—with what thirst will I imbibe these precious sayings which are all so impregnated with the spirit of love! What zeal and revenge against my sins will the sense of that love enkindle! This is the torch which I must carry with me into all the intricacies of the divine word and the divine providence, and of my own soul. Its light will illumine every dark place, and even in the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil. The love of God meeting the wickedness of man—a love maintaining itself against such obstacles—when there was a Judas to betray, and priests and scribes to condemn and crucify the holy one and the just, when he came in mercy to save. It is wonderful, it passeth knowledge. Surely that love, if I yield myself to its power, can lift me up from the abyss of the horrible pit and the miry clay. I am sure that it is able to do this, for,

4. I am urged to carry also to my secret meditation the truth that Jesus was raised again on the third day.

He descended into that depth—borne down under the accumulated weight of all the sins of all his people—as thus burdened the greatest sinner, the most conspicuous criminal the world ever saw, awakening against himself the sword of divine justice, perishing by an untimely and most inglorious death. But he has risen—he wears at his girdle the keys of hell and of death. He hath become a conqueror in dying. He has been justified as well as punished. By the offering of himself he hath perfected for ever all them that are sanctified. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. That death being mine, the victory is also mine. It is a victory given to me in Christ, into the privileges and power of which I am now invited to enter, as against sin and death and hell. In my meditation laying sure hold of that truth, I come forth armed in the very power of Jesus to do battle against his vanquished foes, to tread on the lion and the adder, to become more than a conqueror through him who hath loved me; for neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### § 8. A NEW DIFFICULTY SOLVED.

The import and bearing of the miracle of the piece of money found in the fish's mouth, which some have regarded as the most difficult in the gospel history, will become apparent to us when we have examined the real occasion of it



and the special circumstances in which it was wrought. Let us remember, then, that Jesus travelling from Cesarea Philippi, had come southward into Galilee, and, with the disciples, was living retired from intercourse with other men, seeking a season for them and for himself of solemn retrospection and examination. It was an exercise peculiarly suited to the occasion—a meet following up of the remarkable and impressive events which had recently occurred in their history, and the singular manifestations of truth which had been made to them. It was a time during which, amid familiar scenes, they could recal past events and sayings, and deepen the impression of them on their minds. In the course of their journeying with such an end in view, they most naturally came to Capernaum, for that was the place most of all fragrant with the name of Jesus, and with reminiscences of his words and works. It was the city in which Peter had his home, and which Jesus had so often visited, and in which he had dwelt so long, that it had come to be called his own city.

Here necessarily they come into contact with men, though it is noticeable that on this occasion there is no crowding round the footsteps of Jesus, no urgent solicitations for his council and aid, no sick waiting to be healed. They come now into this town unnoticed and unsaluted—a very remarkable fact at this era in Christ's history, and importing either a supernatural influence exerted over the minds of the people, in order to leave the disciples still free to meditate even there, or, what is far more probable, that familiarity had rendered them indifferent to the actings and words of Jesus, because the nine days' wonder had ceased, and these people, shutting themselves up in the darkness of unbelief, were now abiding the time when they who had been exalted to heaven would be sunk down

into hell, because they had not known the time of their merciful visitation. This fact itself also was fitted to deepen and extend the spirit of reflective meditation in the minds of the disciples. Around them the aspects of external nature remained the same; they could see the houses in which Jesus had performed his miracles of healing, and the streets on which eager and admiring crowds had pressed upon his footsteps, and perhaps the boat in which he had sailed with them, and the now silent shore on which thousands had stood listening to the words of eternal wisdom from his lips. These scenes are not changed, but that which gave them animation and interest has passed away. Capernaum seems already like a city of the dead, as they pass along its deserted streets, with none to bid them welcome, and to hail their approach. This state of things is surely fitted to urge them into deeper meditation upon the fact that the Son of Man would be delivered into the hands of men who would kill him, for an apostate friend becomes ever the bitterest enemy, and these people who had once rejoiced in the presence of Jesus, are now evidently prepared to renounce and to destroy him. The only salutation they meet with is that recorded in the text. "They that received tribute money came to Peter and said, doth not your Master pay tribute?" The spirit in which the question is put is evident enough. But it is rendered certain by what Jesus says afterwards to Peter. "Lest we should offend them, give for me and thee." These men already are seeking an occasion of offence against Jesus. They wish to involve him in a quarrel, to find something on account of which they might blame him and injure his character.

But here comes the first and most important enquiry, necessary for the elucidation of the whole miracle and its

moral significance. What was this tribute regarding which the question is put as to the liability of Jesus? Was it a tax which the Romans imposed, and the publicans collected, or what else was it? Were we to judge by the term tribute in our translation, we would have little difficulty in affirming that it was the Roman capitation tax. That it was not so, however, will appear certain from various considerations.

1. From the amount of it. You will see on the margin of your Bibles that the term translated tribute is *didrachma*, and also that the value of this coin was just half a shekel. This leads at once to the inference that this tax was not a civil impost, but a payment due to the temple and its God, and for upholding divine worship there. The law regarding this impost we find first recorded in Exod. xxx. 11—16, “When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs :) an half shekel *shall be* the offering of the Lord. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel, when *they* give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement-money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls.” Again, in the parallel passages 2 Kings

xii. 4, and 2 Chron. xxiv. 6, 9—"And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in, out of Judah and out of Jerusalem, the collection, *according to the commandment* of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? . . . And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the Lord the collection *that* Moses, the servant of God, *laid* upon Israel in the wilderness." From this passage we find that this impost was still kept up in the times of the temple, and for the maintenance of its service. Originally, indeed, it seems designed to have been paid only on the comparatively rare occasions of numbering the people, and then under the name of redemption money. It is historically certain, however, that it grew in course of time into an annual payment, which indeed one would have almost inferred it to be, from the purpose to which it was to be applied. After the Babylonish captivity, at all events, it assumed the character of an annual tax. In Nehemiah x. 32 it is spoken of as an annual payment. The amount, indeed, is specified at only one third of a shekel, for the service of the house of God, but this restriction on the amount may be regarded as a kind of compromise necessitated by the distresses incident to the recent return from captivity, and the hostilities to which they were exposed from their neighbours. "Josephus mentions that it was an annual payment in his time; and Philo, who also tells us how conscientiously and ungrudgingly it was paid by the Jews of the dispersion, as well as by those of Palestine, so that in almost every city there was a sacred treasury for the collection of these dues, some of which came from cities beyond the limits of the Roman Empire; and then at certain times there were sacred messengers selected from among

the worthiest to bear the collected money to Jerusalem. It was only after the destruction of that city that the Roman Emperor Vespasian caused this capitation tax to be henceforward paid into the imperial treasury, instead of the treasury of the temple, which now no longer existed. Of this Emperor, Josephus says—"He imposed a tribute on the Jews, wheresoever they lived, requiring each to pay yearly two drachms to the Capitol, as before they were wont to pay them to the temple at Jerusalem."\* It becomes sufficiently evident from this testimony that at the period of Christ's earthly ministry this tax was paid annually by all the devout Jews for the service of the temple. In one respect, indeed, it was not of the nature of a tax, for the Jews had no means of legally enforcing it. It was, however, asked and expected, and payment was actually made, out of regard to religious character, and from fear of the disrepute, which would necessarily attach to a refusal of payment.

2. This leads us to the second argument for establishing the fact that this was the temple tax. Our text does not say that it was the publicans who came asking this tribute of Peter. This would have been the name naturally given to those who came levying the imperial tax. And then those men who came do not demand payment, as a right which they could enforce. They merely put the question, "doth not your master pay tribute?" Such a mode of putting it is just what we might expect, when payment was not a thing of legal compulsion, but a voluntary act of legal piety. It is equivalent to saying—Is your master a good and pious son of Abraham—is he willing to give this proof of his friendly regard to the temple and its services, and the God who is there worshipped? Peter might have answered

\* *Trench* on the Miracles.



no, without other result than this, that his master would have been set down as one indifferent, or as an enemy to the temple service, which was just the thing the pharisees and scribes were anxious to charge against him. They avoid the Master himself, which a publican would scarcely have done. But these men had some experience of the penetrating wisdom of Christ's answers to their questions, which not only left them without a ground of accusation, but unveiled the sinister purpose with which they were put. They therefore come to Peter, and he at once, with his usual hasty inconsideration, most natural, indeed, in the circumstances, unhesitatingly answers, Yes. The suspicion of the piety of Jesus implied in the question, at once evokes this answer. He had no doubt that Jesus would be most willing to pay it, and to vindicate his character as a devout son of Abraham, and doubtless he would have at once paid it, but he finds that they have no money. This is evidently implied in the miraculous means resorted to in order to give payment.

3. This conversation has evidently taken place in the street. They that received the tribute allow Jesus to pass on unquestioned, and address themselves to Peter as having his abode at Capernaum. He, having thus been detained for a short time, follows Jesus into the house, and then comes the third and most conclusive proof that this tribute was the temple tax. Jesus has a question to put, as well as the collectors of this tribute, and to Peter a far more embarrassing one. "What thinkest thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? 'of their own children or of strangers? Peter saith to him, of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, then are the children free." Peter had said that Jesus would pay the tribute, and now evidently he claims exemption from it in his character as a son—certainly not as a son of the Roman Emperor, but as the

Son of God. He argues by analogy from the kings of the earth. They do not tax their own children—nay, the taxes are paid on their behoof. Now, here was tribute paid to the great king. Was it obligatory on his son to pay it? Peter had evidently forgotten the import of his own confession, and of what he had subsequently seen and heard when he so readily answered, yes. He is now compelled to answer differently. To this point Jesus brings him back—even to the recognition of his divine character—the dignity with which he is confessedly invested. In giving the answer he did, he had lost sight for the time of the Lord's true position and dignity—that he was a son over his own house and not a servant in the house of another—that he was the head and object of the divine worship which was upheld in the temple, and not a subordinate member of the Theocracy—that it was to him in the person of the Father that these payments were to be made, and not from him to be received. He was to be a ransom for all—not to pay a ransom for his own soul. It was not for him who was greater than the temple—and himself indeed the true temple—which the Lord had built, and not man—identical with that temple in its spiritual significance, and in whom the Shechinah glory dwelt, to pay dues for the support of the temple made with hands, and which was now fast losing its significance, since the true tabernacle had been pitched on earth.<sup>1</sup>

In the nature of the tax, then, and in this argument of Jesus, we discern the purpose of this miracle, and its bearing upon the existing condition and state of mind of the disciples. They had been especially desired to meditate on the fact of his death, and on his victory over it; and this meditation was to be conducted amid the scenes in which he had been for years displaying his

<sup>1</sup> *Trench ut supra.*

mighty power, and after a special revelation of his divine majesty. They understood not the saying regarding his death, for they disconnected it from these significant facts, and were already evidently beginning to lose sight of his glorious manifestation—as they were looking gloomily forward to the death which awaited him. Jesus therefore now again supplies the connecting link. He endeavours to help them over this difficulty, and will by no means have them to lose sight of his sonship in contemplating the fact of his death—and he will associate both of these facts with the nature of the temple service, and what it typified and foreshadowed. He is not the payer, but the receiver of this tribute, and yet he is to die. He is the Son of God, and yet a mortal man. He, standing in that place, where he had removed so many distempers, points them again to that fact of his divine sonship—that they might gather up into one the connected fragments of that truth which would soon dawn upon their souls, that merely as a man his death could signify nothing, more than the death of many who have been murdered for the truth's sake. It was his death as the Son which was significant—which was meritorious—which fulfilled all that the temple service had ever signified. Had he not even at Capernaum exhibited the purpose of his mission, by removing the consequences of sin—had he not been revealing also the higher end of removing its cause? and he, merely as human, could not do this. It was as the Son, gloriously free, and yet consenting to become a servant, that he could alone accomplish this end. By his blood the remission of sins would come, by his righteousness they would become righteous, but not in regarding him as a man only, but as God also. It was necessary for the apprehension of his death that they should remember his divinity, and therefore here again he

attests and proves it, and that by a twofold miracle of knowledge and of power.

1st, When Peter comes into the house Jesus anticipates him by saying, what thinkest thou, Simon? He shows his knowledge beforehand, of the communication which Peter is about to make, and proves that he is already acquainted with what he had to say—that he is a discernor of the thoughts of the heart—that he knows as well as if he had been present and heard it all, the conversation which had been held in the street, and the promise which Peter had made.

2d, He not only proves that he is present everywhere, but that he is possessed of all power—that if he was to die, it was not because he was reluctantly overwhelmed by the malice of men, but because he yielded himself willingly to death. “Go thou,” he says, “to the sea and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth thou shalt find a piece of money, that take and give unto them for me and thee.” There was no way by which more effectually than thus, he could demonstrate his dominion over all nature, and the fact of his being the Son of the living God. His eye was not merely upon men, watching their movements and knowing their thoughts and words, but it penetrated the depths of the sea, and he knew the place and condition of every creature which his hand had formed. He who was to suffer, was the glorious Lord who was now manifesting his divine nature in this miracle, as before he had done in many others. That death of his should not then be a subject of gloomy foreboding only; nay it was the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth.

Such, we apprehend, was the purport of this miracle, and it will be seen how it harmonizes with the whole strain of Christ’s teaching, and of the apostles’ experience at this

period of their history. It is not without significance also that the miracle should have assumed the precise character it did, and that Peter should have been the special witness of it.

1st, As to Peter himself, he could scarcely now fail to remember, as he was resuming for once his old occupation, how on that very sea-shore he had first recognised with fear and trembling the might and majesty of the Lord, and had fallen at his feet exclaiming, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,"—and now to cast his line into the sea, in the full confidence that he would find it even as Jesus had said, and thus to have deepened and confirmed upon his mind the grand lesson which he had been the first to learn, but which he was ever so prone to forget, namely, that Jesus was indeed the Lord, who, nevertheless, had condescended to admit such an one as he, into such intimate and familiar friendship, and who was thus ever proving the depth and fervour as well as the marvellous condescension of his ineffable love.

2d, And then as to the form of the miracle, it was fitted to convey to these disciples and to us a permanent and universal lesson which we ever need to learn. Christ was here exhibiting himself as the Lord of universal nature, and using that lordship, to provide for a little exigency which had arisen in his history. And it is so always. He is head over all things to the church, and he ever uses his royal and universal power to subserve the interests of his people, not meeting them in mighty exigencies merely, but attentive to all their needs, and inviting them in the whole events of their daily life to recognize his hand as the provider, and holding out encouragement to them to be careful for nothing, but in all things, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make their requests known unto him.



All the lessons which the miracle conveyed to these men of old, it is still teaching us, and especially that grand central lesson, regarding the nature of Him who died on the cross, and who gives to that cross its glory—the God-man suffering and yet triumphing—rendering his death a meritorious sacrifice, by the fact that he was divine—owing nothing as a son and yet paying all as a servant—harmonizing mercy and truth, and reconciling to God a guilty world—manifesting in that deep humiliation a love which passeth knowledge, and which is as unchangeable as it is infinite.

## CHAPTER V.

## SELF-DISCIPLINE, AND THE AIDS TO IT.

Matt. xviii. 1—14. Mark ix. 33—50. Luke ix. 46—50.

## § 1. A DISPUTE AND ITS ORIGIN.

Jesus had given his disciples a theme on which to meditate—a theme fruitful in blessings to every believer in all ages who shall surrender their minds to the contemplation of it. That theme was his own death and resurrection. As the event proved, it was a theme peculiarly suited to the present condition of his disciples, fitted to check and to uproot the evil passions which were already beginning to agitate their minds. This dispute as to which of them should be the greatest never could have arisen among them had they yielded themselves to this blessed meditation.

He had admonished them to think of the fact, and of what was implied in it, that he who was the Lord of glory, their Master, the Christ the Son of the living God, had consented to go down to the lowest depths—to become the victim of death—to perish by the hand of violence—had consented to descend so low, that he might conquer—that he might destroy the power of death—that he might become the source of life and immortality. It was the very truth which evidently they needed to think of, in order to rectify all that was wrong in the state of their minds—to get into a proper apprehension of the nature of the heavenly kingdom, and of what was necessary to their elevation and dignity in

it. For the Lord Jesus in himself set forth the true character of his kingdom. He not only preached, but exhibited it, in his life of endurance and obedience. He was not only the author of eternal life, but the model and pattern of it. And as disciples he had once and again taught them, that they were not only to hear his words, but to do his works, that they must be conformed to his image and walk in his footsteps. He was made the lowest of all, and so he became the highest. He conquered by submission. By surrendering all he became possessed of all. That which was thus exhibited in him was the model of the Christian life. To them, as to him it was the way to greatness, to the conquest of death, and to the possession of the kingdom. Not otherwise than by entering into this death and life of his, could they obtain entrance into the kingdom of heaven at all.

But all this to them was not a grateful theme of meditation. They were glad to escape from it. They were blind and slow of heart to understand this, the most fundamental of all Christian truths. They thought they had found a more welcome subject of meditation, in thinking of themselves and of their own condition and prospects. They turned their minds away from the Lord, and began to reflect on their own experiences ; and so the fruits of carnality began to appear. The safety of the Christian is always in looking to Christ, or if he will read profitably the book of his own life and heart, he must carry Christ with him to that inspection. But these disciples forgot Christ and thought only of themselves, and doubtless they thought they had got quite as profitable a theme of meditation, and a far more pleasant one, than that terrible death which they had been commanded to cause to sink into their hearts. For they had many sweet experiences, of which to speak to each other,

as they went over the past history of their intercourse with the Lord and his dealings with them. What tokens of loving-kindness had they received at his hands!—what gracious words had he spoken—what forbearance and tenderness—what power even to cast out devils!

They could not doubt that they were the objects of his all-enduring love, for he had chosen them to be his friends, and their future destiny was bound up with his. There had been differences, indeed, in the way in which he had individually and specially dealt with them. Their experiences were not all the same, though they were all pregnant with proofs of the love of Jesus. He had had a separate word for each, while manifesting his common love for them all. Even Judas had his special honour, and from the fact that he carried the bag, it seemed that he possessed the common confidence of all the disciples. Besides the recorded instances, there were doubtless many others in which Jesus had spoken some special word of affection, or done some kindly deed to each of them. But above all, had he not permitted Peter and James and John to be the sole witnesses of his power in raising the daughter of Jairus, and had not they also been with him alone on the mountain, where they had seen and heard things of which they were not yet permitted to speak? But quite recently, moreover, had they not all heard the gracious words he spoke to Peter?—"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona." There were, therefore, differences among them even as they walked with Jesus on the earth. While all of them had received the same calling; they had not all been admitted to the same privileges. It was not unreasonable to expect, therefore, that such distinctions would continue to be maintained, or even that they would be increased hereafter—that in the kingdom of heaven as in the kingdoms of the earth, there would be differences of

place and degree and dignity—that as there was one glory of the sun, and another of the moon, and another of the stars, and as one star differed from another in glory, so would it be among the ransomed souls who would reign with Christ. There was nothing either in the revelation, or in the actings of Jesus, to discountenance such a view, and it was natural as well as pleasant to anticipate the future from the past, and to look forward to the time when the humiliations and labours of their present state being over, they would reap a harvest of glory, and assume their places in that kingdom which knows no change or decay.

There was nothing in all this inconsistent with their loving regard to the Lord. On the contrary, the very affection they felt for him would quicken their desire for the nearest, and most honoured place beside his everlasting throne. There was nothing in these meditations, therefore, necessarily and inherently mischievous. At the same time, there was an evident peril attending them, which they had not the wisdom to avoid. They terminated in a dispute which gave rise to angry feelings, of which they had cause to be deeply ashamed. Their conversation did not, indeed, inevitably tend to this. But this must have been its landing place, unless it had been entered on and carried forward in a far different spirit from that which they had yet acquired. Had they kept steadily before their minds the subject of meditation which Christ gave them, they would have been saved this shame and dishonour. Forgetting Christ's death, their natural feelings of self-assertion and personal ambition resumed the sway, and in their disputes and divisions they manifested the deep feelings of carnality which were still within them. That death of Christ, and his victory over it, was the only possible bond of union between them, as it was the only source of a self-sacrificing affection.



It was with them, as it still is with us. It is by no means an unlawful or even a profitless thing for Christians to rehearse to each other their religious experience—to recal and speak of the manifold acts of the Lord's loving kindness—the special manifestations of his grace, and the revelations of his glory made to their souls, and to look forward and to speak of their anticipations of the kingdom to come, and its blessedness, and the manner of its administration. But to us, as to them, it is an exercise fraught with danger—an exercise which can only be safely engaged in at all, when our spirit is thoroughly humbled—with our eye fixed upon the cross, and its manifold teachings of our personal abasement and unworthiness, and in the spirit of him who, being the first of all, became the servant of all. Separated from this believing contemplation of Christ, and from a present participation in the fellowship of his sufferings, the tendency of such an exercise is always evil. I am only safe in speaking of my experience of Christ's loving kindness to me—safe from the arrogance and deadly power of spiritual pride, when I am lying at the foot of the cross, and am beholding *there* at once my own vileness, and the highest proof of Christ's love, till I grow into the very spirit of that love, and learn that the highest dignity in this kingdom of heaven is to occupy the very lowest place.

Let us now attend to the circumstances in which the fact of this dispute was brought out by Jesus and made the subject of observation. It is very evident that there is considerable discrepancy in the statements of the three Evangelists who record the facts. Matthew says, "The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Mark again says, that "Jesus being in the house asked them what was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace; for by the way

they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest." Luke, again, with greater brevity, tells us that "there arose a reasoning among them which of them should be the greatest, and Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child." In these different accounts there is nothing actually discordant and contradictory. It is not difficult to weave them all into one harmonious narrative. 1st, We have the fact recorded by Luke that this dispute had arisen. 2d, The fact recorded by Mark that when they were assembled in the house—evidently in Capernaum—in that very house in which Jesus had held the conversation with Peter and soon after it—though not before Peter had time to return, after having paid the shekel for himself and his master—when so assembled, Jesus puts the question to them—What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? They must have been certain that since he knew the fact of their disputation, he was also aware of the subject of it. And so Mark tells us they held their peace. It is here where the apparent contradiction lies, for on reading Matthew alone we would infer that the disciples were the questioners, and not Jesus—that they had boldly and openly proposed the question to him—Who should be the greatest? And it is certainly not impossible that it may have been so—that after a period of reflective silence, when Jesus had put the question to them, they may at last have found courage to speak. This would reconcile the whole literalities of the text, and it is perhaps best so to receive it.

Understanding it thus, then, it becomes evident that they had themselves been able to come to no settled conclusion on the subject of their dispute, and that they had agreed to refer the matter to Jesus personally. It also appears from the narrative of Mark that they had found it by no means

so easy as they had supposed to shape this question of theirs into words. When they were challenged on the subject by Jesus they held their peace. They felt it a far easier thing to carry on such a dispute in the absence of Jesus, than even to state the subject of it when in his presence. It was a dispute that never would have arisen had they carried Jesus with them into the controversy—had they remembered his words, and realized his presence.

And the same thing is true of most of the controversies which have vexed and divided the church. Christ has first of all been shut out of the conference, the eye of the mind has been diverted from the cross, and the spirit of ambition, and selfishness, and pride has revived, and men have got angry instead of learning to be humble.

It is to this point that Jesus is now drawing these disputants. Before he questions them so closely, indeed, he has been directing them to this result. And it may help to account for the reluctance and shame which they felt to state to him the subject of their controversy—to notice the example which Jesus had been just shewing them, and which forms the obvious connecting link between the text and the preceding narrative. He, the acknowledged Son of God, had consented to be dealt with as a servant in his Father's house—to pay the half-shekel of redemption money, lest he should offend the people of Capernaum. This is expressly assigned as the reason for his submission in this particular instance. He raised no dispute with the people about his immunities and dignities, and if he so dealt with the people of Capernaum, how much more was it their duty to deal tenderly with each other? He did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. His greatness lay in his condescension, and humility, and self-sacrifice. This also was the path for them, and it is so for

us. It is pride that is the chief generator of offences, and nothing is so alien to the spirit of Christ as pride. Everything demands that the Christian be humble. He is a man redeemed from hopeless bondage, and has nothing of his own. He has become the servant and follower of him who consented to be despised and rejected of men, and his business is also to deny himself, and to take up the cross. He has nothing to do with pride, and vain glory, and ambition, except to crucify them.

## § II. CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

When, in the circumstances we have stated, Christ had drawn from the disciples the subject of their dispute, and had thus prepared their minds for listening to his words, he sets before them at length what ought to be the state and character of the true subject of the heavenly kingdom. It is over again, and in a different connection, a summing up of what now for many days he had been more indirectly conveying to their minds.

He calls a little child, and sets him in the midst of them, and takes him in his arms, and says, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." This great truth Jesus teaches by the eye as well as by the lips. This mode of instruction, in fact, lay at the basis of all true Christian teaching and knowledge. It was so that he all along had been teaching them, had they been able truly to understand him. Had not he, the Christ, in order to found this kingdom, the possession and dignities of which

they had degraded by making them the objects of their mere carnal ambition—had not he become a little child—was he not still the lowest among men—was he not destined to die a shameful death—had he not invited them to become, and had they not become, followers of his? They were fools and blinded by their carnal nature not to have understood this long ago. Must his teaching really begin anew again, and employ itself about the very alphabet and rudiments of Christian knowledge? It is even so. But he could not impart this knowledge by words alone. Passing out of the sphere of carnal feeling and knowledge, into one so entirely contrasted with it, he finds that the language in which men are wont to express their thoughts to each other is not adequate to embody the ideas he wishes to convey. So entirely is pride the element of sinful humanity, that the nations had not found a word to express the idea of Christian humility. The Hebrews, indeed, had in their language approximated towards the expression of it, but that word had been translated into the common meaning which the Gentiles attached to that which is merely low and mean. But this is far from the idea of Christian humility. Even we to this day may learn best what it imports by reverting to the symbolic action of Jesus on this occasion. In doing so we shall see that it signifies more than we, with the help of all our Christian ideas, are able to express in a single word. This child, in fact, is still and ever standing in the midst of us, and by looking to it, we shall come best to understand the divine words of Jesus.

Let us notice that the action of Christ in reference to this child was threefold. 1st, He called it; 2d, He set or placed it in the midst; 3d, He took it in his arms. The child then evidently was one of tender years, and yet sufficiently ad-



vanced from infancy that it could hear and understand his call, and walk to him who invited it. It does not appear as if the child was familiar with the person of Jesus. But with that instinct so remarkable in little children, it came obedient to the call of this stranger, and unhesitatingly put itself into his hands. That pure and tender heart of Jesus must have had a resistless attraction for children, who beneath all disguises perceive whether true tenderness and love to them are in the heart. It was only after this that Jesus spoke in answer to the question of the disciples. After sitting down—with the twelve ranged in a circle before him, that they might hear his judgment on the interesting case submitted to him—after calling this child, and placing him in the midst, and taking him in his arms—this child who so absolutely and unsuspectingly commits itself to him—after this appeal to their observation and sense of what has been done, he says, “Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” He appeals to what they had seen in order to interpret what he says; and what is that? How do we read that symbolic action? Obedient to the word of Jesus, the child hears his call and comes—then it stands there where Jesus places it—then it rests in his arms. This, then, is Christian humility—this is the element of the Christian life. To be thus is to enter the kingdom of heaven, and to become the greatest in it. It is to hear and obey the call of Jesus, and to come to him—it is to remain there in his presence, just where he pleases to set us—to rest in his love—to be on the one hand absolutely and unresistingly at his disposal—to look to and lean upon him—in one word, to be as this child. “Only look

at it and observe how it has now shown itself, and stands before your eyes. It is called, and it comes—it is placed, and lets itself be placed—is embraced, and lets itself be embraced—it follows, obeys, receives, mistrusts not, resists not, is prepared and tractable to one whom it knows to be greater than itself, just because it knows this: that he is a friendly man, and that it is a child. Such humble trust in receiving and obeying, such simple yielding up of ourselves to the love and power of God, which embraces us in Christ and seeks to lift us up from earth to heaven, such is the childlike state which conducts us to the kingdom of heaven. As the child always believes itself safe when it has laid itself in its mother's lap, or when its mother holds out her hand to it, so it is with a childlike faith in the gracious word of our heavenly Father, revealed in his Son.\*

The first and fundamental lesson of Christianity, then, is humility, and that not in the ordinary acceptance of that term as used among men, but Christian humility, such as was exhibited by this little child in its submission to the word of Christ, and its obedience to him. This represents the true Christian idea of humility. It is the emptying out of ourselves into Christ, a loving trust and confidence in him, and our subjection to his will—to have our ear and heart open to his voice, and to do all things in his name—not to live ourselves, but to have Christ living in us.

This lesson the little child taught by its action, and not by its nature. It is a mistake to suppose that little children are naturally humble. They have in them the proud heart which characterizes maturer life. Christ by no means teaches that the Christian life was the natural development of the life of childhood. Children have in them

\* *Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus.*

the germ of all the passions which manhood displays—they are proud, passionate, jealous, selfish. In studying this lesson, then, we must be careful not to extend the analogy beyond the limits which the action of Jesus assigns to it. There are just two things in the character of childhood that present those features which Jesus demands in the Christian.

1st, There is that yielding confidence which this child manifests. Childhood is not self-reliant and independent. It yields itself up to the will and direction of another.

2d, There is no aristocracy in childhood, it recognises no difference of rank and wealth. The child of the beggar is recognised as the equal of the child of a king.

In both these things the disciples needed the lesson which Jesus here teaches. Their question was, which of them should be the greatest—a question indicating the presence of that incipient ambition which was already desirous of the exercise of lordship and authority. Jesus says, you must become as little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Among them there are no gradations of rank ; they cannot recognise its claims, or court its honours. There is at least among them an equality and fraternity. You also must be brothers in order to get to heaven at all. Your lust of personal dignity will not only deprive you of *it*, but bar your access to heaven itself.

Moreover, consider what you are—among whom such a dispute has become possible. Look at this child. It comes when I call it, *is* where I place it, and rests in my bosom when I embrace it. You, too, are what my call has made you. You stand where I have placed you, and your highest and most honourable position is to rest thus confidingly on me. You cannot attain of yourselves any place of dignity and honour, not even the lowest place

in heaven. You must be where the love of the Father deigns to place you—highest when most self-abandoned, and leaning on me as this child now does.

But before teaching these lessons by symbol, Jesus, as Mark relates, spoke this word, in order to fasten their minds on the lesson his action is meant to convey. “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and the servant of all.” All along Jesus had been teaching this by action, as now also he does by word. This was substantially also the first word taught them in the Sermon on the Mount, when he opened his mouth and said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It was the special lesson of his whole life. To him, beyond all question, belonged the highest place in the kingdom. In what way did he reach it? Even by the very path which he now indicates to them and to us—by becoming the last of all and the servant of all. It is this which determines the dignity and glory of the future state. Christ the Son of the living God, the king of this kingdom, has become the lowest of all—has descended, and will yet descend into greater depths—will go down to death and hell—has given up all to become possessed of all, and will die in order to live—he has become the servant of all, even of the lowest and most abject and degraded—the servant as well as the friend of publicans and sinners. This universal service is the glory of the crucified one, and for you there is no other pathway to glory. You are his friends and followers. For you there is no lordship and supremacy but this service. By the path of self-sacrifice and self-abandonment lies your way to rest and to glory, even as it did in his case.

It is thus, and for this reason, that Jesus associates so closely the nature of this humility with the expression and manifestation of it. His discourse on this occasion, indeed,

when attentively studied, branches out into three heads. 1. Humility. 2. The outward expression or manifestation of it; and 3. The foundation of it. But in the narrative these three apparently run into each other. They, in fact, are inseparable and mutually illustrate each other. It is important, however, to consider them separately, that we may more distinctly perceive their mutual bearings on each other. We have already sufficiently considered the first, namely, the nature of Christian humility. It is equivalent to the new birth described in his discourse with Nicodemus. It is the abandonment and destruction of all old things—of all that was ours—ambition, self-righteousness, sins—of every thing we had, and our being made new creatures in Christ, being thus in ourselves nothing, and having Christ as all and in all, and resting in his love.

### § III. BROTHERLY LOVE.

Christian humility is to be manifested—1st, By the kindly brotherhood and affection of the disciples towards each other; and 2d, by their avoiding of offences.

These are the proofs and evidences which he demands from the disciples as the sole proofs of their humility. It is most needful both to remember this fact and to apprehend the reason of it. For, truly, in the history of the church, nothing has been more grievously misunderstood than Christian humility, and its proper outgoings and exercises. Does it not even seem to you as if there were some break in the continuity of this discourse? Does it not seem as if when Jesus said, whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven—he was speaking of one thing, and



when he adds, whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me, he was speaking of another and quite a different thing. If we understand aright, however, what Christian humility means, we shall see that the theme is the same. He describes first what humility is, and then, how it expresses itself. Their reception of such children was but the outgoing of their humility—its uniform and legitimate expression in actual life. Yet it is not thus, that what men have agreed to call humility has always manifested itself. There is in their conduct frequently a kind of abasement which is very closely allied to pride, and which developes itself in the very worst kind of spiritual pride. Much is said by such persons of their own inherent corruption and blindness, and of the sovereignty of God—much of their natural inability and of the power of divine grace—much that is all doubtless true, but which leads to no grand practical issue. To such people even truths such as these become an abstraction, and not a reality. They are convinced that there is such a thing as a vital conflict between the powers of light and of darkness, but they rather stand apart from it and look on, and please themselves with their capacity of understanding the movements of the hostile forces. There is humility in them after a sort—a hearty acknowledgment of their utter baseness and vileness—and an equally honest and hearty acknowledgment of the power of divine grace to overcome and renew the whole nature. But their humility proceeds no farther. They stand and gaze at these stupendous truths, and are as it were paralysed with wonder, and the more they study them the more they stand apart from other men.

Oh, there is a fearfully hardening and blinding influence in the sublimest truths of religion when they are not vivified

by the person and presence of Christ ! Let it be no longer grace merely, but Christ that I am looking at. Let me find myself where this child was, resting on the compassionate and tender heart of Jesus, sustained there by the everlasting arms which embrace me, and let me ask myself how I came to be there—thus resting in my helplessness—thus sustained and bucklered round about, in spite of all my vileness. Let me look into the depths of that heart of love which has invited and drawn me there, and to the fact that Jesus, after all, presents not the emblem of the deepest humility in the exhibition of this little child, but is himself the pattern of a humility deeper still in so embracing and sustaining that child—that he who is the greatest has become the least of all and the servant of all—has become even my servant in so embracing and apprehending me. Let me truly understand and feel all this, and then I shall not merely apprehend this marvellous meeting of demerit and grace, but, as I rest on the bosom of Jesus, my heart will begin to beat in unison with his. I will feel that it is not my part merely to be received and embraced, but in that childlike embrace I will grow into the ever ready capacity to receive and embrace. The humility of Christ found its expression in this very thing. He became the last and the lowest that he might be the servant of all, and just in so far as I enter into the spirit of his humility, this will be my office and work also. It is the only way in which my humility can display itself. It is an evidence and proof to me that Christ has not lifted me up and taken me to his embrace, unless these little children also are my brethren and received to my embrace. Have not they also sought refuge even where I have done, and found rest there ? Has Christ received them and shall not I ? Can I dispute with them for precedence and dignity

when the highest place for us all is that child-like trust and resting in Jesus—when to assert my independence and dignity, is necessarily to shut myself out of the kingdom, and to prove myself not a member of the family at all?

It will be observed that Jesus speaks here exclusively of the little children—that is, as he afterwards explains it—of those who believe in him. He says nothing here of the relation of his disciples to the world, and of their treatment of the men of the world. Such a subject would have been at present beside his purpose. He is solving the question which his disciples have raised, and that is a question exclusively concerning the relation of the disciples to each other. And in answering that question he fastens his attention upon two beings in whom that relation is exemplified. 1. On the received; and 2. On the receiver. This little child received is the emblem of the first germ, and pervading characteristic of the Christian life, it clings to Christ, and embraces him. This is humility. The child does not stand apart, and scowl defiance, but willingly yields itself up. He embraces and sustains it—it embraces and cleaves to him. There is an outgoing, then, for this humility. It is embraced, and then it embraces. So the Christian is apprehended, and then apprehends. In that humility of spirit through which we apprehend and cleave to Christ, we receive and embrace also all that are his. They become our brothers. Apprehending our own relation to him, we come to know theirs also. And they are received by us as brothers, and in no other capacity—for we embrace them, not because of what is peculiarly loveable and attractive in them, but in virtue of our common relationship to Jesus. We receive them in his name. It is in this character they come to us, and are recommended to us, because he has taken them as little ones also in his arms, and has taught them

to rest in him. Their place and ours are the same—their relation to him and ours are the same. In cleaving to him our soul loves them also. It is only thus that we can embrace them as brethren, for doubtless we will find in them, even as they will find in us, many things worthy of being despised and condemned, but with that name of Jesus upon their foreheads, and in the remembrance that we were alike poor and despicable as we were received by Jesus, these grounds of difference disappear, and we admit them into our heart because Christ has received them into his.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say that our reception of the little ones implies what Christ's reception of us and them does—that is to say, in its measure and degree. For it is impossible we can do or devise that good which Christ intends and accomplishes in those whom he makes his own. But to the limit of our power it is our business to do them good—to be mutually helpful to them as brethren ought to be to each other. It is not enough that we tolerate them—that we refrain from hating them, and from doing them injury. We must receive them—take them up—interest ourselves in them—love and do them good. In doing so we are getting nearer to Christ, and so to the highest place and office in the kingdom.

There is here, as in many other departments of the Christian life, a mutual action. It is as leaning on the bosom of Christ that we are enabled to receive them as our brethren. It is the humility that is learned there which has its outgoing in this brotherly affection. But then it is true also that in receiving them we are again receiving Christ. We can conceive how much nearer to the apprehension of men the knowledge of the infinite and unseen God was brought by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He was the revealer of the Father to men—the brightness of his glory and the

express image of his person. He, said Jesus, who hath seen me hath seen the Father also. In him who is Immanuel, believers attained a far more intimate knowledge of the unseen God, as a living God—a real person—entering into converse and fellowship with men. But Jesus has now become himself also the unseen. He is present on earth now only in the person of believers, and now it is in and through them that we attain a more full and intimate apprehension of him whom we have not seen. His grace, in its manifold forms and rich abundance, is to us little else than a name, save as we find it illustrated in its effusion upon his children and disciples. In our fellowship with them, moreover,—in loving and doing them good—in acting so far the part of Christ towards them, we get into closer sympathy with that love which is in the heart of Christ to them all. And in observing the marvellous exhibition of his grace towards us and them—alike to those who are both so unworthy of it, we are more able to bid away all distrust from our minds, and to cast ourselves always, unreservedly and entirely upon the compassionate love of their Lord and ours. It is in loving that we apprehend what it is to love. It is in forbearing and forgiving one another, and in honour preferring one another, that we grow into that perfect love which casteth out fear.

Is it not true, brethren, that one of the most glaring defects, one of the sorest evils of the church in our own day; is the want of this Christian brotherhood? And, if so, must it not be because we want Christian humility? Alas, there is in this want, a double fatality! Want of brotherhood proves that we are not resting with humble confidence in Christ, and that want removes us still farther from Christ. If a man say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how



can he love God whom he hath not seen? It is time for us to do battle against this spirit of pride and self-reliance—to hear again the call of Jesus—to stand, as it were, in his presence, and to rush into his outstretched and loving arms. In feeling that tender embrace of his, we shall become again capable of this exalted Christian affection, and in cordial fellowship with our brethren, we shall also find that we have obtained nearer access to the Saviour.

#### § 4. CHRISTIAN UNION.

It is seldom that we meet with a continuous, uninterrupted discourse of Jesus. His intercourse with his disciples, and indeed with all men, was free, cordial, and close, much more in the form of a conversation than of a continuous argument, exposition, or appeal. Jesus evidently preferred this form of instruction. A question was to him no interruption, if it was put in an honest spirit, and by one really needing to be informed. It was an evidence that he had arrested the minds of his audience—that they were going along with him in his discourse, and had become interested in it. And, doubtless, this is the most successful form of teaching, wherever, with propriety, it can be adopted. It is a method evidently the most trying to the teacher, but as evidently the most profitable to the learner. The opportunity of putting questions—of desiring further illustration and proof of a particular theme—is a precious one that ought not to be neglected by any one.

I have noticed that the disciples had recently passed into a region of higher information—that they were now no longer merely passive recipients of what they were told—that their minds had begun to act upon the information

they received—and that they were now really striving to master it and make it their own. Formerly the scribes and pharisees had been the sole questioners of Jesus—questioners whom he did not always put aside though he knew their malignant purpose; because through their questions he obtained an occasion to expose, and reprove their most dominant errors, and to exhibit the truth which was opposed to them. Now, however, a spirit of honest enquiry has been awakened in the minds of the disciples. In a truth loving spirit they now become his questioners. When he speaks some response is elicited from them. Their minds are thirsting for knowledge, and the intercourse between the Lord and them becomes a kind of holy conference.

It is so on the present occasion. Jesus is interrupted in a discourse, in which it appears he has much to communicate, and this time it is not by Peter, but by John, who but rarely becomes a speaker in these conferences. But the subject on which Jesus is now speaking is one in which he feels a peculiar interest, and it is from him most naturally that the interruption comes. He, more than any of the rest, had been entering fully into the meaning of the emblem which Jesus was presenting, into the spirit of human trustfulness and submission, and its outgoing in acts of kindness and compassion. He, more than the rest, thirsted for that place of repose on the bosom of Jesus, and therefore it was the place which Jesus, in the presence of them all, ultimately assigned to him. He was eminently the disciple whom Jesus loved, because in his heart there was the greatest capacity of love. He was a man constitutionally of a genial, trustful nature—a man whose heart was drawn out towards others, and therefore drawing them to him. He lived in an atmosphere of love, and this is the fruitful theme of that testimony which he has bequeathed to the church. He

entered at once into the conception which that little child in the arms of Jesus was designed to convey. And he longed to realize in himself that state of humble and all-pervading trustfulness—to be a child in the arms of Jesus. And when at length he reached that attainment, and Jesus set him even there as a jewel on his breast, there entered into him that very spirit which is the manifestation and proof of Christian humility. The echo of his gentle voice is still heard in the church, saying, “Little children, love one another.” His trustful surrender of himself to Jesus made him the most loving of men, and he evidently had begun already to think how he was to carry out into practice these words of the Lord. He could already take to his heart these brethren of his, could consent to be the last of them, and to become the servant of them all.

But were these all? Did his doing this exhaust the meaning of the Lord’s words, when he was acting merely towards *them* as a brother? If there were others also, how was he to recognize them? The words of Jesus did not mean evidently that he was to embrace all men as brethren. They had respect only to little children. How was he to know them? Did not this humble, Christian love, which had been inculcated, moreover, imply a different sort of treatment of others—above all of those who should affect to do Christ’s works, and yet not be followers of Christ? These are the questions which are stirring in his heart. He does not, indeed, put them just in this form. His humility makes him hesitate directly to put such questions. He ventures merely to mention a fact, which notwithstanding has the substance and reality of a question. “Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.” By this statement he was evidently appealing to

Jesus, whether they were not right in this prohibition. He was somewhat confident, apparently, that they were right. For did not the words which Jesus had now spoken imply the unity of the church—the brotherhood of all its members—and consequently that they should be all together as members of one family? Having all one centre of attraction, one home and resting-place in the bosom of Jesus, one source of Christian energy, and helpfulness and love, must they not all also form one company? What right had that man, who did not belong to their society, who followed not with them, to use the name of Jesus, and to attempt to do his works?

This question is obviously not one of temporary interest. It affects the relations of the church through all ages. It is one which, alas, these words of Jesus have not conclusively settled in the minds of men, but which is ever and anon rising up again, with an interest as fresh and vital as at first. And yet Jesus does not leave it unanswered—nay, his answer is not so mysterious but that it may be understood, if we attentively consider it. It determines for us most of the questions relating to Christian union.

1st, Let us look to the *facts* in this case; and then, 2d. To the *principles* involved in these facts.

As to the facts we have, 1st, The statement that the man in question, very possibly one of the disciples of John the Baptist, who had never joined himself to the company of Jesus and his disciples, was yet using his name in his exorcisms for casting out devils. The disciples could not say that he was doing this in the spirit of perverse opposition, and with the view of casting contempt on Christ's work, or for the sake of worldly gain and credit to himself, as was the case afterwards with the sons of Scaeva. All that they had seen or knew about him, was the work he was doing and the name in which he did it.

2d, They did not say that this man was making a pretext merely. On the contrary, they affirm that he really did what he professed to do. John bears witness that this man did cast out devils in Christ's name. He in fact was exercising a greater power than they had recently found themselves able to put forth. But they knew that he had not been called and set apart and commissioned as they had been to do this work ; and therefore,

3d, They forbade him. He had not been with them, nor was he now. They acted in the spirit of Joshua in a former age, when he desired to prohibit Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp in the wilderness, when the spirit of God came upon them. Joshua supposed that this function of prophesying should have been restricted to Moses. But then, as now, the Spirit of the Lord was not straitened, and Moses, in the largeness of that Spirit, wished that all the people of the Lord might prophesy.

The gifts and grace of God are not restricted to forms of consecration and external organizations. There is something in them far higher and deeper than these. In truth, these forms of setting apart, and of public commission on the part of the church, are nothing else than the recognition by the church of a gift or grace which God has already bestowed. This recognition or ordination on the part of the church does not confer the gift or grace where they are not already ; the refusal of ordination does not prevent the gift, or its exercise. It is Christ who calls and endows his own servants. It is the business of the church to recognise the gifts he has bestowed, and to own them by her ordination.

In the present act of prohibition, the disciples had gone beyond the limits of their own commission. Jesus had sent them forth to preach and to cast out devils, but he had



never enjoined them to prohibit any body else from doing these works. It was not their business thus to circumscribe the Lord. He had given them powers, but he had never said that these powers were exclusively theirs. He might, and actually did confer them upon many others.

4th, Therefore, Jesus takes up a different ground from the disciples. He does not forbid this man. On the contrary, he reproves the disciples for forbidding him, and assigns as a reason for it, that no man would do a miracle in his name that would lightly speak evil of him. He generalises the case, taking it out of the special category of casting out devils, and drawing it into the more general one of working a miracle of any kind. Nor is it this man they are blamed for prohibiting, but any man who may be found doing a similar work. A man so working is not to be forbidden by the disciples on such a ground as they allege, for Jesus adds, "he that is not against us, is on our part."

5th, Jesus does not command them to unite themselves with this man, nor to go and bring him into their company. He leaves him just as he was, and to follow the course on which he had entered.

Such, then, briefly are the facts of the case. What do these facts teach us? What principles are involved in them?

1st, And most obviously, that we are not to assume the prerogative of prohibiting any one from working in Christ's name. The doing of this has been the source of incalculable evil in the church. What the disciples had now done was, in fact, transferring the spirit of their selfish ambition merely into another region. They now perceived, indeed, that they must live as brethren, and be mutually helpful to each other, each of them becoming the servant of all the rest, and striving for the lowest place rather than the highest. But then, when they came to consider their re-

lation to those beyond the pale of their own society, were they not to assume the mastery? Was it not for them to determine who had their Master's commission, and to exclude from his work those who had not been ordained as they had been. We have said that the answer of Jesus did not practically settle the question which John here raised. Yet that answer is plain and explicit enough. "Forbid him not." This is not at all your province. You have your own work to do. Do not seek to make yourselves responsible for others. But plain as this direction is, the spirit which broke out in John has subsisted almost ever since, and thus prohibitions have never ceased to be thundered against imagined intruders into the Lord's work. The great question has often been, not what is the work done, but where is your commission for even attempting to do it? This has been the language and attitude of Popery throughout its history, and herein as well as otherwise it manifests the spirit of antichrist. For such prohibitions are always directly in the face of Christ's words. It is not the commission which authorizes or establishes the work, but it is the work which proves the validity of the commission. There are two principles, both of them false, which impel the church of Rome to this course. The first is her doctrine regarding the unity of the church, and the second her doctrine of apostolical succession. Both, as held by her, are false and anti-scriptural.

The church, indeed, is one, but not necessarily so, in outward organization. Nay, this visible organisation is not essential to the existence of the church at all, and has in fact been often awanting. It was so in Israel in the days of Elijah, when he believed himself to be the only one who had not bowed the knee to Baal. It was so when Jesus came into the world, into the midst of the apostate Jewish

church. Had it not become so also at the period of the Reformation? The church is indeed one. It consists of all men who have the spirit of Christ, and they are one because that spirit animates, directs, and sanctifies them all. They are not the less one that they may never see each other's faces, or know of each other's existence. The real characteristics of the church are all spiritual. They are necessarily perverted and misconceived when they are applied to human organizations.

Again, the doctrine of apostolic succession is in the highest sense true. But who and what were the apostles? They were men endowed by Jesus Christ with the necessary gifts, and commanded by him to do his work in his name. Who are their successors? Evidently those only on whom Jesus has bestowed the needed gifts, and whom he has called to do his work. My being consecrated and ordained of men is not to succeed the apostles. The apostles were not so ordained. My calling must be of a far different sort, and my endowments other than men can confer, in order to take up and to do that work of theirs. The Romish doctrine of apostolical succession, indeed, destroys the possibility of it. It substitutes the work and functions of man, for those of Jesus Christ. This doctrine may indeed be consistently held by them, when, alongside of it, they maintain that the Pope is on the throne, and occupies the place of Jesus Christ, for then his sanction and consecration are equivalent to those of Jesus himself. But for prelatists to contend for such a doctrine, as many of them do, is necessarily to conduct them to Rome.

The maintaining of such a doctrine, however, whether consistently held or not, must lead to prohibition—to persecution, wherever the power exists. For, if Episcopal consecration be necessary, then, to perform ministerial

functions without it can be nothing less than blasphemy, which all pious minds would seek to silence. But in the face of all such restrictions and limitations, it becomes us still to hear the voice of Christ, "forbid him not." Christ is not limited to one particular communion, whatever it be. Let us always look to the work rather than to the doer of it—to what a man is accomplishing rather than to the commission he bears. Even though it may be evident to us that some preach Christ out of contention and strife, let us rejoice notwithstanding that Christ is preached. If devils be cast out, and their work destroyed, it matters not so much by whom these things are done. Yea let us so humble ourselves in our conscious weakness, and in our faithful cleaving to Christ, that in the spirit of Moses we may be able to say, "Would God that all the people were prophets." This is one of the highest exercises of self-discipline.

But, 2d, the far more perplexing question arises, if, then, we are not entitled to prohibit, is it not our duty formally to unite? If this man is doing Christ's work in Christ's name, must we not receive him as a brother and join him to our society? It is assumed (for what Jesus had been saying made it evident) that Christians should receive one another—should have a common interest, and work towards a common end—that all of them, resting on the bosom of Jesus, should be as children of the same family. This external visible unity is obviously the rule, the right state of things, and that for the attainment of which men should labour and pray. In the case with which Jesus is dealing there can no question arise regarding a real living unity apart from such outward realization of it, as happens in the case of Christians living in different countries, or who are otherwise unknown to each other, and have no opportunities of mutual intercourse.

This case is quite different. This man is in the same country, and doing the same work as the disciples had been doing and were called to do, and, moreover, at the very time they had signally failed, he is doing it successfully. And yet Jesus gives no instruction that they should become visibly one, that they should bring this man into their society. It is obviously his will and purpose that they should stand apart. Wherefore?

Nay, may we not rather ask why he should be invited to join them? What evidence had they that he, after all, was a Christian? Would it not have been as rash and wrong on such proof as they had, to receive him, as it was to prohibit him? If he were a Christian, was it not certain that he would seek them? Was it not possible for him to call Jesus Lord otherwise than by the power of the Holy Ghost? Were there no hypocritical and wicked men, who cast out devils and did many wonderful works? Has not Paul affirmed the possibility of removing mountains, without the possession of Christian love? In any age are we warranted in concluding certainly that a church or a man is truly Christian because conversions—the casting out of devils—may be effected by their ministry? Nay, God has a people even in the bosom of the great apostacy, whom he is calling to come out of her. Judas did not fail in casting out devils, because he was a hypocrite and a traitor. The reception of grace by sinners is not dependent upon the personal character of ministers, any more than on their official standing and succession. I have no warrant to prohibit any one from speaking in the name of Jesus. But still less have I a warrant to unite myself with any one, merely because he may speak in that name successfully. The disciples could not be told to receive this man as a brother, just because he manifestly was keeping himself



apart from Christ. This, then, is my position too. If I find a man following Christ with the spirit of Christ in him, I must receive him as a brother, to whatever communion he belongs, but not otherwise ; and the church with which I am authorized to unite in visible fellowship, is a church subject to the will of Christ, and acting according to his law.

3d, Meanwhile my business is not with external union, but with obedience to Christ and subjection to his authority, and with endeavouring, so far as in me lies, to induce others to do the same. So far as this subjection prevails, the union is real though not external. There is the same mind, and the same course of action. In order to this, external union is not essential. I need not rush hurriedly into that, but patiently wait the development of events. Substantially this is what Jesus directs his disciples to do in the present instance. For the word which in the text is translated *lightly*, more properly signifies *forthwith* or *shortly*. It is equivalent, therefore, to his saying, "This man as yet has not appeared as our adversary. Though not following with us, he is not openly and avowedly against us, nay, acting as he is now doing, he is rather on our side. Doing a miracle in my name, he will not, even for his own sake, immediately thereafter speak evil of me. Let time and farther experience prove what spirit there is in him. It is not necessary to rush into union. Let it be proved whether he is the same in doctrine and in action with you. Meantime leave him alone. You are not to compromise your own testimony by a hurried and unwarrantable judgment."

4th. Union, therefore, will inevitably come as the result of unity. Can two walk together except they be agreed? Conversely, those who are agreed will walk together. It serves no good end to either party to unite till there be this

unity of spirit. That union which is the result of policy is always injurious to the church. It is a simulation of that which is not, and puts restraints upon Christian liberty.

And finally, let it be our concern to be personally, and as a church, with Christ, with whomsoever else, on that account we may differ. For, after all, the unity of the body consists not in the collocation of its parts, but in the fact that all its members are under the control of the same will, and are all pervaded by the same life. So is it in the spiritual body. They in whom the divine unity is realized are one. They in whom it is not realized cannot be made one. The church, by such an attempt, becomes a social or political, and not a divine, institution—becomes, in so far, a creature of the world, and ceases to be a faithful witness for Christ. There is then just this one way of seeking unity, by encouraging and stimulating each other to realize a humble trustfulness and obedience to Christ ; and thus, when all of us are seeking the same centre, and home, and place of rest, we cannot fail to keep company by the way. When the precious ointment which has descended upon the head—the oil of joy wherewith Christ has been anointed above his fellows—flows down upon the skirts of his garments—when the dew that rests on Hermon descends also upon the hills of Zion, then will be realized the good and pleasant spectacle of all brethren dwelling together in unity.

#### § V. THE AVOIDING OF OFFENCES.

We have stated in a previous section that Christian humility finds expression for itself in two ways—1st, in brotherly love, and 2d, in the avoiding of offences. We

have already considered the first of these ; the second now invites our attention.

The avoiding of offences obviously involves the same principle as brotherly love, and is even more evidently the offspring of humility. For the chief source of division and strife,—the cause or occasion of offence among men, has been the assertion of self. He who walks humbly with God—who acts without any personal or selfish design—whose interests have all become identified with Jesus Christ, because he has heard the Lord's voice, and is resting trustfully and in conscious helplessness on the bosom of Jesus,—such a disciple is not likely to offend his brethren. It is when pride takes the place of humility—when a believer forsakes the Lord and seeks the promotion of his own ends, and the gratification of his own ambition, that he becomes offensive to other disciples. Christian faith always implies brotherhood—equality, and not lordship—the consecration of all gifts and graces, with a humble heart, to the service of Jesus Christ. It does not imply sameness, nor hinder the utmost diversity of gifts, opportunities, capability, and usefulness in the church, but it implies that the believer lives in and by Christ, and that he and the least endowed are alike servants of a common Lord, to whom they are indebted for everything, and in whose service they are willing to expend all they have.

It is worthy of notice that Jesus dwells more minutely and pointedly on the matter of offences than on that of brotherly love. He speaks thus in harmony with all the utterances of God. It is always the negative side of a question which is most largely dealt with in Scripture. The positive injunction to love, for example, is simple, uniform, all comprehensive, and admitting of no amplification. The violations of the spirit of love, on the other

hand, are manifold, and it is by these that men are tested, whether they have the spirit of Christ. The moral law positively expressed is extremely brief—Thou shalt love God with all thy heart ; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Expressed negatively, and still with the utmost brevity, it branches out into ten commandments. Duty is one—error is manifold. To proclaim what we ought to do is simple—to indicate what we are not to do demands a larger exposition.

Moreover, it is always the negative form of duty which is most apprehensible by us. When we ascend into the positive we are apt to lose ourselves in a mere dream of sentiment. Love unproved, rather occupies the imagination, than the heart, and the exercise of it is little else than a pleasing delusion. It is proved and tested by prohibitions. It is thus that we ascertain its true nature and durability. Thus I may say I love God, and persuade myself of the reality of that divine affection by merely filling my mind with all the delightful and glorious pictures which are the fruit of my own meditation and fancy, and loving that which I thus present to my mind, it may be nothing more after all than a kind of reflex self-love. I thus create the God whom I adore. But true love finds its exercise and development in practical experience, in contact with divine providences and appointments—in bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. So it is also in brotherly affection. Sitting in solitude, apart from others, I may persuade myself that my heart is full of tenderness and love. I call up before my mind all that is loveable in them, and imagine that I can embrace them all as brethren. I am conscious of no enmity towards them, and believe my selfishness to have been thoroughly subdued. But all this, so far, is but a picture of the imagination. It

is when brought into actual contact with them that my love is tested. Then, when my path is crossed, when I am thwarted and disappointed in my aims, it will be seen whether the patient, all-enduring love of Jesus Christ is reigning in my heart.

This matter of offences, which Jesus here treats with such terrible solemnity and power, divides itself into three branches. 1st, The grievous sin of giving offence to believers. 2d, The position of the world in reference to offences. 3d, The sharp remedies to be employed in order to remove offences. Let us consider these in their order.

But first of all, I may say a word on the connection of this discourse. In Matthew there is no record of what constitutes the appropriate introduction to the question of offences, as related by Mark in the case of him who was casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and who had been prohibited by the disciples. They had, by their unwarrantable interference, offended this man. They had judged that he was not a brother, because he did not belong to their society, and had perhaps quenched in him the beginnings of the spiritual life, which, in its farther growth and development, would have brought him to the feet of Jesus, and into outward fellowship with them. But even apart from this incident, the matter of offences comes out as an appropriate antithesis to what Jesus had said of receiving little children in his name. And this antithesis helps us also to ascertain the proper import of the terms used in the text.

1st, Let us then consider the grievous sin here indicated. What is it? To perceive this let us read Matthew xviii. 5, 6, in continuation—"Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better



for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea." To offend them is the opposite of to receive. It is to refuse to receive, to treat a disciple in an unbrotherly way, not to acknowledge him, to hurt or to despise him. Whosoever treats a disciple thus sins presumptuously and grievously—however lowly such a disciple may be, and however feeble. The fact that he is a believer raises him to the dignity of the highest, for he is thereby a son of God—dear to Jesus, and therefore to be kindly and tenderly treated by all who are Christ's. Christ makes the cause of his people his own—He carries the lambs in his arms. To injure them is directly to assail him. If the reception of a disciple be the reception of Christ himself—the rejection of a disciple must be the rejection of Christ. He lives still on earth in the persons of his people. Men can no longer reach him with their proud scorn and revilings. They can no longer buffet him, and spit on his face, and lead him to an ignominious death. But he, in these very sufferings, identified himself with his people, as still he does, and they being yet on earth, are exposed to the enmity and contempt, and persecution of men. But he lives in them as they live by him, and to offend them, is to renew the offence against him—to crucify the Son of God afresh, and to put him to open shame. He, in these words, places before them the shield of his almighty protection. They are his, bought with his blood, and precious in his sight. The afflictions they endure at the hands of men are all acts of personal hostility against the great king. He will have both the world and the church to apprehend and remember the intimate and endearing relation in which he stands to them. To offend them is an act of treason against him, and worthy of death.

Beware of this ye proud ones of the world who de-

spise the lowly disciples of Christ. You refuse to acknowledge and to aid them. You think them weak and helpless ; but they after all are the true nobility—every one of them is a prince, and is destined to wear a crown. They have an unseen but an all-powerful avenger. You cannot put forth your hand against them and prosper. Sooner or later punishment will come for this offence. The persecutor of God's saints must meet a terrible retribution.

Beware of offences ye who are within the church's pale. In offending you take the world's part against the little ones of Christ. He has set them in the midst of you, to be cherished and defended, and nurtured up to strength and vigorous manhood. Take heed that ye offend them not. Be gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. If you are not, you have in you the heart of Judas, and not the spirit of Christ. Your pride and malice discover themselves in offending the children of Jesus Christ. You had better be guilty of any sin than that. It is a direct assault upon the majesty of the great king. You touch the apple of his eye. It were better for you that a millstone were hanged about your neck, and that you were drowned in the depths of the sea. Better such a punishment as this than the one which surely awaits you. Better for you so to die than to become a stone of stumbling to these.

Oh with what tenderness and circumspection then it becomes you to walk ! If you should defile the conscience or betray into sin one of these lambs of Christ's fold, yours is the work, and yours must be the destiny of Judas. Alas ! the greatest enemies of Jesus were not after all those open, violent assailants, who haled him to the judgment seat, and shouted for his crucifixion. There was one who had a darker criminality than them all. He who insidiously, and under the mask of friendship, betrayed him. For that man

there was no hope. Beware of such a crime, for it is not rare on the earth. Alas how many there are who seek to ensnare and corrupt the disciples of Jesus—to betray them into sin—to entice them to become partakers of their evil works. If you act thus, the worst forms of human punishment were a mercy compared to your doom.

The punishment here described by Jesus was a rare one, but sometimes practised among the gentiles, and to them it was attended with peculiar horrors, because, according to their belief, it implied their exclusion from the realms of bliss. Jesus, in adverting to it, moreover, aggravates it to the uttermost. He does not merely speak of being cast into the sea with a stone round the neck. But he speaks of the offender as cast into the deep sea, where the body would be irrecoverable; and a mill stone is, in the original, not a stone used for grinding with the hand, and common in all families in those days, but the stone of a mill driven by an ass, and much weightier. It is as if he had said—your punishment shall be without remedy and without end. He who thus habitually sets himself against the disciples of Jesus shall encounter such a doom as this. How tender, then, is this love of Jesus, and at the same time how fierce his indignation! For such a terrible retribution is but the jealousy of unrequited affection, and a proof of the love which he bears to his own.

2d, Jesus proceeds to speak of the position of the world in reference to these offences. “Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come.” This is the doom of the ungodly and unbelieving world, to lie at once under condemnation because of offences, and to underlie the necessity of perpetrating them. There is here a two-fold necessity. The world being as it is, cannot avoid offending the disciples of Christ. In its natural corruption, it

cannot be or do otherwise. It will ensnare and betray the disciples of Christ, or openly persecute them. So long as men are worldly, they must act according to their nature. They can only cease from offending, by ceasing to be of the world. Till this change take place, they are against God, and consequently against his people. Marvel not, says Jesus, on another occasion, that the world hates you, it hated me before it hated you. From Cain and Abel downwards it has been so, and must be so to the end, for what concord hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ with Belial. The carnal mind, which is enmity against God, must manifest that enmity against those who bear his image.

But there is also another ground for the "*must needs be*" of these offences. In respect to their end or design, they are a necessary part of the discipline to which the disciples of Christ must be subjected, in order to become meet for their inheritance. Therefore, they are tolerated in the long-suffering and wisdom of God, who maketh the wrath of men to praise him. As in the history of Christ, so also it is in that of his disciples. The Lord laughs to scorn the impious attempts of his adversaries, and makes them subservient to his own gracious purposes. When the Jews crucified Christ, they hastened on his victory and conquest. The crown of thorns was the antecedent to the crown of glory, and to the establishment of that kingdom which they vainly thought to destroy. Even so is it, in its measure, with his disciples. By their trials they are at once proved and perfected. The offences and hostility of the world, confirm and strengthen them. His outward conflict with evil keeps the soldier of Jesus Christ clad in his mailed armour, and with the shield of faith he quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. "There must be also heresies

among you," says the apostle Paul, "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." It is thus that the separation is effected between the world and the church. The winnower must come, with his fan in his hand, thoroughly to purge his floor, and to gather the wheat into his garner. But the process which separates also purifies. It is a process which the church needs to undergo, and therefore the Lord permits men in their wickedness and by their offences to effect it. But he who commits the offence is not therefore guiltless. He does a work, indeed, whose issues are gracious, but he did not mean it to be so, neither did his heart think so. It is the doing of the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes. The Lord being ever gracious to his people, the rejection of the stone issues in its being made the head of the corner. The trial of faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, is found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. But woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. Like the sons of Eli of old, they shall go down to perdition. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? To offend Christ's little ones, is really to transgress against the highest. It is again to thrust the spear into the side of the bleeding Saviour.

3d, Let us consider the sharp remedies which must be employed for the removal of offences. Jesus has just been speaking of the necessity of offences coming. They must be, because the world will act according to its nature, and wicked instincts; and they must be for the sake of the church herself, in order to prove and so to perfect her. Such is the result of the external and necessary conflict with the world—the conflict with outward temptations and



the victory over them. But then these offences, after all, come from within. They are the development of a corrupt nature. Jesus does not content himself, therefore, with imposing restraints upon that inherent corruption, but goes to the very root of the matter. He carries them from this conflict outside to the warfare within. If the church, in resisting and overcoming her external foes, is strengthened and purified, how much more will it be so in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit within a man's own soul? This, after all, is the real battle field on which the spiritual man encounters all his combined foes. If he is defeated here, he is lost; if victorious here, his victory is complete and final.

Do not, therefore, be ever looking outward in order to detect and to complain of the offences which come upon you. It may be that the offence is within yourself. These members of yours, have they been all yielded as instruments of righteousness unto God? There must be for you the endurance of a far more painful trial than the external conflict with the world involves, because it implies your separation from that which is still more closely united to you. Wherefore, says Jesus, "If thy hand offend thee (be to thee the occasion of offence or sin) cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth

not, and the fire is not quenched." There is for you only this alternative. There is no escape from pain. All must endure it now or hereafter. If you will cherish within you the causes of offence, if you refuse to separate from that which leads into sin, however dear it may be, however needful even it may seem to you, there awaits you the unquenchable fire of hell—which is not purifying but punitive. But if, on the other hand, you will become thoroughly self-denied—if you will faithfully exercise this painful discipline—if you will part with that which binds you to the world and makes you dear to it—if you will really become a living sacrifice, then the fire of that trial by which you are separated from the corrupting element will be found a purifying fire, by which your ungodliness will be utterly consumed, and you will become holy and acceptable unto God, and meet for the heavenly inheritance. That warfare which is the believer's destiny must be waged first of all, and chiefly, within himself, and for the destruction of his own carnal nature. Doubtless it will be a painful conflict, from which he cannot escape without scars. But these will be marks of honour, like the wounds of a soldier on the battle field. However painful the process, the hand, the foot, the eye, all belonging to us that ministers to unrighteousness, must be mercilessly and unsparingly plucked out or cut off. We must make no compromise with our sins. Nothing that defileth, or maketh a lie, or worketh abomination can enter into God's holy habitation. The very purpose of redemption is, in us, defeated, unless we are redeemed from all iniquity. And evidently we cannot deliver ourselves in such a warfare, for it is a warfare to be waged against ourselves. This battle must therefore be fought in sight of the cross, and through the efficacy of that atoning blood which purgeth the conscience from dead works, that we may serve the living God.

## § VI. THE SALTING OF THE SACRIFICE.

To the terrible and emphatic warning to which we have just adverted, Jesus adds, as the ground or reason for the adoption of such a severe remedy, "*For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good ; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith will ye season it ? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.*" This is one of those concentrated expressions which embodies so much meaning that its import becomes obscure. Confessedly, indeed, this is one of the most difficult texts in the Bible. Its language is evidently highly figurative, nor is its proper and literal import very apparent. This much, however, is plain enough, that it has reference to the typical sacrifices of the Mosaic economy. Its first and second clauses stand so related as to leave no room for doubt on this point. These clauses must be held as mutually serving to interpret each other. "Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." The ordinance of the Levitical law, to which reference is here made, is contained in Lev. ii. 13, "Every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt, neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering : with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." Though the command to offer salt occurs in that ordinance in connection with the meat-offerings of the Jews, it is evident that the use of it was not limited to these offerings. This appears because salt was the token of that covenant which all their offerings implied, and is here, indeed, extended, in express terms, to all offerings of whatever kind, whether to the burnt-offerings of atonement, or to the meat-offerings of thanksgiving.

It is, in the first place, to the burnt sacrifices that the words of our text invite attention. It was in these only that there was the use both of salt and of fire. These offerings alone, therefore, adequately represent to us the process which Jesus here describes when he says every one shall be salted with fire. In these burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin, therefore, let us remember that these two things were present, namely, salt and fire—that which consumed, and that which the fire could not destroy—an agent of destruction and an agent of preservation—fire exhibiting the one, and the salt the other. These sacrifices, therefore, were evermore proclaiming that same truth which the sacrifice of Christ so fully unfolded. The sacrificial victim had its life first of all taken away, and then its body was laid on the coals of the altar, where it was subjected to the action of fire. It seemed as if by this process it must be utterly consumed. Yet it was not so, neither was this the ultimate design of the sacrifice. The victim was salted previous to its being laid on the altar, salted not for destruction but for preservation.

These two ideas, then, were presented in every burnt offering—ideas apparently, but not really, contradictory—namely the idea of the wrath which consumes and of the salt which saves from dissolution and decay. The fire destroyed that which was corruptible, it left untouched that on which it had no power to act. There was death, and yet preservation from utter destruction.

In this respect these sacrifices pointed to two things—first, and most specifically, to Christ himself; and second, and more indirectly, to Christ's people. The fire and the salt indicated that process which was to take place in the experience of both.

1st, in the experience of Christ. He, like the sacrificial

victim, suffered death. In the one, as in the other, there was an imputation of that sin which deserved death. In the burnt offerings under the law the sins of the individual or of the people were confessed with the hand on the head of the victim, and by that significant action the transgressions of the offerer were transferred to the sacrifice, which was consequently held worthy of death, and its blood was accordingly shed. Even so, without any such formal outward action, Jesus took to himself and made his own the sins of his people, consenting to bear them in his own body on the tree—thus becoming sin for them, and underlying the punishment of death. But the offering was not ended when the sacrificial victim was slain. It was laid on the altar, and consumed by fire. For sin had not received its desert in the mere infliction of temporal death, in the separation of the soul from the body. The death which is the wages of sin comprehended far more than this. After death there was the unquenchable fire and the undying worm. To represent this awful fact in the desert and punishment of sin, the dead victim was laid on the altar, and was subjected to the action of fire. And so it was in the sacrifice of Jesus. It is true he died, but there was far more than this in his vicarious punishment. His body indeed was not consumed in the flames, but the fire of Jehovah's anger laid hold on his spirit, and his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. The sword of divine justice was unsheathed against him, and it pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief. His travail emphatically and peculiarly was a travail of soul, which, though incognisable by the human eye, was not the less real and terrible. It was in the endurance of that agony that he bought his people—with this sacrifice he paid the ransom price of their redemption.



But still farther, the sacrificial victim of old was not utterly consumed. It was salted ere it was laid on the fire. The preserving salt as a leaven, which permeated the whole mass, was put upon the body of the victim, and when the fire had exhausted its force, that salt remained. The victim was not destined to destruction, but to preservation and immortality. Thus also was the body and soul of Jesus prepared. He was destroyed, and yet preserved. The fire of the spirit of wrath was upon him, yet he did not see corruption, for the salt of the covenant of God was upon him. He died, and yet he survived. He suffered wrath, and yet was glorified with life and immortality. He had in him that which was imperishable and indestructible. By death and fire he conquered death and hell. By the salt and by the fire of the old economy, therefore, was the sacrifice of Christ prefigured. The sacrifices in which they were used were a token at once of wrath and of reconciliation. They typified the punishment of sin, and yet deliverance from it. They spoke at once of destruction and of preservation. These two opposites also met and were harmonised in Christ. Dying, he became death's conqueror. Subjected to fiery indignation, he was yet justified. He was both condemned and acquitted. He was consumed and yet saved alive—destroyed and yet preserved. There was to him the fire, but there was also the salt. He was salted with fire.

2d. Even so is it in a subordinate sense in the experience of his people. The baptism to which he submitted was made theirs also. Them also the sorrows of death compass about, and the pains of hell get hold of them, they find trouble and sorrow. To them there is anguish of soul—the revelation of an offended God—the sense of deserved misery—a sinking into the depths—a self-abhorrence and repentance

—to them comes in this way crucifixion and death. It is to them that Jesus here speaks, and reveals their destiny in the light of his own anticipated death, and in the light also of those sacrifices with which their minds had become so familiarized. He had previously been speaking to them of his death and resurrection—of his destruction and preservation—of his defeat and victory—and had demanded that they should let his sayings sink deep into their minds. And now again necessarily he reverts to this theme when he would deliver them from the woe of those offences which were to bring judgment on the world. He demands that they should look to these old sacrifices, and to him as the one sufficient sacrifice, and consider what was meant in the whole order of these offerings, and through what kind of process they also must pass in order to become true children of God, and sharers in the resurrection life. He would make it evident that what was taking place without them must also in some real and important sense exhibit that which must take place within them.

Of what avail to any man could these sacrifices be, existing as a mere scenic representation or as facts in history? In order that sacrifice may subserve its end in me, I must apprehend its nature and bearings—I must know not merely that Jesus died, but I must go and consider the mystery of that death—the revelation of wrath and mercy which is given in it—I must look to that lamb of God as sacrificed for sinners like me, and apprehend, in the view of it, my own desert of wrath and exceeding sinfulness, and pronounce on myself that very condemnation under which he suffered—I must lay my hand on his suffering head, and make over to him my countless transgressions, and thus enter into the fellowship of his sufferings by becoming a sufferer along with him, and by enduring in his person the wrath of God,

—the holy law of God slaying me even as it slew him ; and thus, espousing God's cause against myself and against sin, presenting my body as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God, which is my reasonable service. God's law then and thus makes war in me against all the evil that is in me, and I make war against it, cutting off whatsoever offends and casting it away—consigning that to the fire—mortifying my members which are on the earth, and crucifying my flesh with its affections and lusts. It is thus that I am made truly a partaker of Christ's death—by entering into and making it really mine—by submitting to the justice of his sentence, and taking up his cross—willingly yielding myself to the verdict of God's law, which slays me, and having now therefore no life in me but that which I have in Christ. For in this death there is also a life—in this destruction an immortality. There is the salt as well as the fire. Christ died to live, and so thus do I. The fire of this sacrifice purifies but does not destroy—it refines while it scorches.

The fire of the Levitical sacrifices indeed indicated this blessed truth, for fire was the token of an accepted sacrifice as well as of consuming anger. It was sin against which it burned—sin being destroyed, it became light and heat. For this is the property of fire always. God is at once love and a consuming fire. Where there is no sin, men rejoice in the radiance of his glory—where sin is, his light scorches and consumes it.

Contrasted then with the case of those who are consigned to the fire that is never to be quenched, is the destiny of the man who, consenting to become a sacrifice now—to part with whatever offends—to expose it to the scrutiny and condemnation of God, is in that self-sacrifice and mortification of the deeds of the body, salted with fire. To him

the fire becomes salt, and the salt becomes fire, for by fire he is purified and saved alive, and the salt burns up and consumes the elements of evil in his nature.

It is for this reason, and more distinctly to indicate this truth, that salt was mentioned so prominently in connection with the meat-offering. The meat-offering was not to be subjected to the action of fire, but it had on it the salt of the covenant of God, and was thus presented to him as a pure and holy offering of thanksgiving. Thus also the Christian becomes a meat-offering, when he has become a burnt-offering. His sins are wasted away in the consuming fire of God's wrath and love, and he then becomes a holy and acceptable meat-offering unto God, having in him the salt of the covenant.

The statement in the sermon on the Mount, in which believers are designated the salt of the earth, and this text, must be held as mutually illustrating each other. There, it is especially worthy of notice, that the character and function of Christians, as indicated by their being called the salt of the earth, is brought out in immediate connection with their suffering persecution. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." It was even by such an instrumentality that the great sacrifice was prepared and offered. Wicked men slew and hanged him on a tree, and thus, his conflict being ended, he entered into glory. Even so it is in the experience of his people. By the offences of the world, which must come, they also are separated and set apart unto God. The fire of that furnace in which they walk with the Son of God purifies, but does not consume them. It is the salting of the sacrifice whereby it becomes acceptable unto God. Doubtless it

is a painful process whereby these deceitful lusts of the world are consumed, and a complete separation from them effected, the mortification of their members which are on the earth, and the self-denial and crucifixion implied in it. It is salting by fire. But if there must be this sacrifice under the pain of damnation—if this separation between me and the world must be made, is not the sacrifice all the easier that the world itself inflicts the fatal blow? And herein lies the blessedness of persecution. When we have made up our minds to part with the world—to pluck out the eye that looked on its beauty, and to cut off the hand that grasped its forbidden fruit,—the world itself lifts the sword, and in true, though undesigned kindness, amputates the hand. When we have come to know that the love of the world must be destroyed within us, the world itself makes the change unspeakably easier by turning upon us the baleful aspect of its own hatred. When we come to learn that it is essential to salvation, that a great gulf should be fixed between us and the world, the world itself helps to cut down the bridge of communication. Its hatred and persecution become the instruments whereby the holy sacrifice is salted.

But by whatever process, or through whatever instrumentality, every one must be salted with fire. It is impossible that, as we are by nature, we can see the kingdom of heaven. We must die in order to live. The old man must be crucified, that the new man may be created. That eye must be plucked out, with which we look covetously upon the treasures of the earth, and its schemes and enjoyments. It is better to be blind than to be cast into hell. That foot with which we have run so swiftly and eagerly in the pathways of the world's multifarious errands, must be cut off. It is better to be halt, than to be cast into hell,



That hand with which we embrace the world, and clasp it to our heart, must be cut off. It is better to be maimed than to be cast into hell. For every one shall be salted with fire. Better the pain of amputation now, than the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. Better the self-sacrifice now than damnation hereafter. Let the offence be altogether in the world and not at all in you.

But it may be asked, why should I be so very careful in this matter? Must not such a change be wrought upon me in the very fact of my becoming a member of Christ? Does not my living union to him secure and make good to me this holy and devoted life? Undoubtedly it does, if that union be actually realised and made good. If I am truly Christ's in his death, I am his also wholly and unreservedly in my life. I am led and animated by his Spirit, and by his strength walk in his footsteps. But, alas, the formal union is not always a real one. That which I profess does not necessarily represent that which I am. It is possible for me in an outward and formal way to enter into the fellowship of Christ's death—to declare my faith in it—to become outwardly a member of his mystical body, and to appear thus like the sacrificial peace offering salted with salt, while this process has not even begun in me. “Salt is good, but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?” It remains a corrupt mass; that which has been sprinkled upon it, is not the salt of the Covenant of God. It is savourless, and therefore not conservative. How shall we then, after all, determine whether we are so seasoned, and have become sacrifices acceptable unto God? It is only by diligent self-scrutiny, by weighing our thoughts, and desires, and actings in the balance of the sanctuary—by an introspective glance into the secrets of our hearts, and by endeavouring to ascertain

whether they are beating in harmony with that of God. Doubtless by this partly, but not exclusively. For by this self-scrutiny and introspection alone we shall certainly deceive ourselves. Salt does not exist for its own sake. It salts something which was unsalted. Ye are the salt of the world. The Christian lives not to himself. The grace which he has must become the generator of more grace in himself and in others. If ye are Christ's, it is your part, as it was his, to seek and to save the lost. For this end God preserves believers in the world, and brings them into the closest connection with it. You cannot live healthily upon your own sentiments, or even upon the air of heavenly meditation. You must be fruit-bearing. The grace which you have received, you must impart. You are like the leaven which has been cast into a measure of meal. It is the very use for which you were designed in the world to communicate to it your own heavenly life and light. Salt cannot be brought into contact with any substance liable to decay without imparting to it its own flavour and conservative properties. This is the gracious end which God purposes in bringing believers into contact with the world, and keeping them in it. If this end be not served by you, you live uselessly, and what is even worse, you live very sinfully. You prove against yourselves that you are the savourless salt, which is good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the feet of men.

There is not in the universe a more pitiable object than a Christian who has no savour of Christ—than a Christian who does not diffuse his Christianity. He is twice dead, and has become a mere name—the falsest and most unreal thing in nature—the mockery of that which is divine. His destiny is shame and everlasting contempt. The world in

which we live is a reality—its passions are as true as they are powerful—its hatred to God as genuine as it is invincible. The Christian who is without the savour of Christ—who diffuses no healing virtue, is as vile as the world, and is infinitely more hateful. In him, that which God appointed to preserve the world from utter corruption, has become the most corrupt thing in it.

But if ye truly seek to fulfil your vocation—to salt the earth in which you live—God may not indeed give you the world for a conquest. Yet yours shall be a twofold reward. 1st, You shall have salt in yourselves. The grace which you have employed in God's service is not wasted, but, as seed sown in a good soil, renders back to you an abundant harvest. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, you are brought into closer fellowship with him, and grow into the stature of a perfect man. And 2d, You have peace with one another. When among you there is envy, and strife, and divisions, is it not because ye are carnal and walk as men? But when the word of God dwells in you richly in all wisdom—when ye hold forth that word of life—and your speech is always with grace seasoned with salt, then, though the world without may hate you, ye shall at least have peace with one another. In the possession of that peace, ye shall be strong to cast the evil both out of the world, and out of the church. Being pure and single-hearted yourselves, and having a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man, your unseemly internal strife shall be at an end. Having no object of your own to seek—being self-denied, and crucified, and given up unto Christ, he shall become to you all, and you will love one another with a pure heart fervently, and know how true it is that godliness with contentment is great gain.

## § 7. THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

In the exercise of self-discipline—in the maintenance of true humility and brotherly love—believers are not left unaided. “Take heed,” says Jesus, “that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” It is evident enough from the preceding context who the little ones are. They are not merely children, but those who have become child-like—who have felt their need of help and nurture—the little ones of God’s adoption, who have heard the voice of the Saviour, and obeyed his call, and are resting in his love. In their relation both to God and to the world they are little ones. They are God’s children, fed by the sincere milk of his Word—in living union with the only begotten of the Father, and thus objects of his everlasting and paternal love—in their conscious helplessness casting themselves on his care, and committing themselves to his guidance, and trusting in him with an undivided heart. They are little ones in relation to the world—exposed to manifold dangers and death in it—unable alone to direct their steps—and finding their way through it only by the gentle guidance of their Father’s hand. They are children of a royal family, but not yet manifested as the sons of God. Their glory is not an external one which men see and are disposed to reverence and worship. The only begotten himself, whom all the angels worship, was on earth despised and rejected of men, and such also is the destiny of those who are his. The disciple is not above his Master. This world is not their home, and they are here like children whose lineage is unknown.

Their features are not lovely in the eyes of men, and the lessons they have learned at their home are not pleasant to the ears of men. They appear to have no weapons of offence, but their harmlessness does not tame down the world's opposition and hostility. They are not only estranged from its affections, but appear to be safe objects for its assault.

Yet Jesus cautions the world, and his disciples alike, not to despise one of these little ones. There is no iniquity which God will more surely visit. They who offend or throw a stumbling-block in their way, are playing with the deadly thunderbolt. There are indeed some among God's children who are not despised—who are so much men in understanding, or who occupy such a position in society that the world is constrained to pay them outward homage. But that which is respected in them is that which they have in common with the world, and which constitutes no essential part of their heavenly inheritance. That which makes them really little ones in all positions of human life, is that which makes them contemptible in the eyes of the world. Yet it is this which constitutes their true dignity. It is the mark of their high origin and glorious destiny. To them in all their weary pilgrimage belongs the privilege of Jacob. To the human eye there could scarcely have been a more insignificant being than the patriarch, when being a fugitive from his father's house, and when a safe return to it being barred against him, he sought repose for his wearied limbs under the open sky—a man without a friend and without a home—an unprovided wanderer going to seek shelter among the dwellings of the stranger. “And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set, and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that



place to sleep, and he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord stood above it," and confirmed his promise, and Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place, this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

This vision presented to the sleeping eye of Jacob, was the symbol of a great fact. Wherever God's children have their abode, at home or in the open plain, that ladder is set—the pathway of intercourse between that spot and heaven. And the Lord stands above verifying as well as repeating his own promises, and the angels are performing their ceaseless ministry of mercy. The believer is a temple of God, and his standing place is the gate of heaven. He is the habitation in which God has chosen to dwell. To offend him, therefore, is to commit sacrilege—to despise him is to cast contempt upon God. However poor and lowly he may be, and however little distinguished by what the world respects, to him belongs a royal birth, and he is most royally served. To him the angels are ministering spirits—winged messengers of mercy and love.

It is this consideration which Jesus here presses upon the attention of men. These little ones have "their angels which do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." He says nothing here, indeed, expressly of the ministry of angels, though that is necessarily implied in the statement he makes. What he directly affirms is this—You cannot offend these little ones without deeply offending God—you cannot despise them without contemning the Most High. For their angels behold the face of my Father—they are admitted into his immediate presence—they stand beside his

glorious and universal throne, the favoured servants of my Father's house, who see his face continually, and from whose fellowship he never excludes himself—who, being themselves pure, are permitted ever more to see him who is infinitely pure. And these angels thus dignified and honoured, who occupy the highest and nearest place to the throne above, what are they in relation to the little ones? They are *their* angels—to whose charge the Lord hath committed his little ones—and these angels are most honoured in this very fact. The angels are *theirs*—their servants, as servants of my Father, to whom he hath entrusted the guardianship of his children. This is their place of trust and honour, this is their blessed ministry. These little ones who are so dear to my Father must have attendants worthy of their birth and destiny. If one of these swift winged messengers were visible to you in the radiance of that light amid which they dwell, you would be overwhelmed with fear and wonder, and be constrained, as John was, to tender to the glorious being your worship and homage. But evidently those whom they serve are greater than they. The prince is higher than the nobleman who forms a part of his household. These little ones who were created lower than the angels, have been exalted above them. In their unity with the only begotten, they are sons, while the angels are servants. The highest orders of created intelligence despise not these little ones, but are unto them ministering spirits, and how much less should you despise them, you who are yet lower than the angels, and would be proud to be exalted to the dignity of serving such glorious spirits. It is your part, then, not to despise the little ones, but to unite with these spirits in serving them. For in placing all things under the feet of the Mediator, the Father placed all things also under their feet. They are in and with him, and his glory is also

theirs. All things, therefore, are subordinate to them, and work together for their good. Willingly or by constraint, all things and beings are made servants to them, and it is written, the nation and kingdom that will not serve them shall perish, yea, all those nations shall be utterly wasted. And when the final judgment shall come, and the books shall be opened, and your eternal destiny determined, this service and ministry shall be the one test of your acquittal or condemnation, for the judge shall say inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did not unto me. These shall go away into everlasting punishment. Take heed, then, that ye offend not one of these little ones. Better commit any offence than that. No sin is more sure of wrath and retribution than that.

This ministry of the angels is surely a high privilege of God's people. Yet perhaps more than any other pertaining to them, it is practically lost sight of. The Lord sends these ministering spirits to guard his people, and to uphold their footsteps in the rough pilgrimage of life, and they, for the most part, are unconscious of the honour. The Lord warns men to respect and deal tenderly with his little ones, because of this ministry, and they, in great measure, do not believe in its existence. Yet it is a truth, doubtless most useful to be kept in mind, both by the church and by the world, in order both to assure the hearts of God's people in the hour of tribulation, and to awe the world into deference and respect for the holy seed. Let us briefly notice, therefore, some of the facts and declarations regarding this angelic ministry to the saints which the Scriptures have preserved, that we may understand somewhat of its nature and uses.

They are represented as constant attendants on him whose throne is in heaven, and whose kingdom ruleth over

all. They are employed by him as agents in the government of the world. They are the great ministers of providence, both in reference to the world's empires and to his own children. That they exercise this general government is evident from the vision of Daniel and the revelation made to him, regarding the destiny of the Persian kingdom, when the angel says: "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but, lo! Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me."

They were frequently the messengers both of mercy and vengeance in old Testament times. It was an angel who announced to Abraham the birth of Isaac. An angel announced to Manoah the birth of Samson. The law was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai by the disposition of angels. The angel of the divine presence went before the children of Israel in all the way of the wilderness. Angels were sent to foretel and to execute terrible destruction upon the cities of the plain. An angel with a drawn sword appeared over Jerusalem to smite its people with pestilence for the sin of numbering them. By an angel the mighty host of Sennacherib was destroyed in one night. The angel smote Herod for receiving the blasphemous acclamations of the people. And when the final judgment shall come it shall be thus at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. From the beginning of the world's history to its consummation, then, angels have had to do with the affairs of men, executing and carrying into effect the will of God regarding them.

But their special office and employment is in relation to the heirs of salvation. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them. This ministry is not a

fresh revelation to the New Testament Church. The saints of old rejoiced in the knowledge of it, and gathered fresh confidence from it to sustain the good fight of faith. When Abraham sent the steward of his household to seek a wife for his son, among his own kindred, he felt assured that he would prosper on his mission, for the Lord, said he, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee and prosper thy way. And David again and again breaks out into songs of rejoicing confidence in the grace and efficacy of such a blessed ministry. "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them." "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways, they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Nor did that gracious ministry cease when Jesus came. It was then, indeed, that this service became more frequent and active. An angel announced the birth of Christ's forerunner, and to Mary he foretold the birth of Jesus, and a choir of them hailed in everduring song his advent into this world of woe. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." Angels attended the footsteps of the Son of Man, and witnessed his agony, and strengthened him to bear it. They still watch the heavenly birth of souls, and spread joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth. Christ's little ones have their attendant angels who wait upon them from their spiritual birth, and at length bear their souls to the place of rest. For we read that when Lazarus died he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The bodies of the saints even are committed to angelic care, for Michael, the Archangel, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses; and they await them on the morning of the resurrection, for when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, he



shall send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.

It is true, indeed, that all this gracious ministry is invisible, but it is not on that account the less real. It is a spiritual ministry, but an effectual one. The vision of Jacob's ladder warrants the inference that it is by angels that the intercourse between heaven and earth is maintained. Nor does the idea of such a ministry separate between us and the Lord himself. A gift or message is not less truly from the Lord that it is conveyed to me by the hands of an angel. The Lord is not less truly present with me, that he makes an angel my ministering spirit. Nay, does not such a ministry help to bridge over in my thoughts the distance between me, a helpless sinful creature, and the great God who filleth heaven and earth? The Lord standeth above, but the intervening space is occupied by his angels, who are spirits, and his ministers, who are a flame of fire. Is it not fitted also to make me more reverential and watchful to know that an angel of the Lord encompasseth me, and waits to minister unto me? Does it not tend to awaken me to stronger confidence, and courage, and enduring patience in the day of adversity, to know that an angel has been appointed my guardian? If they strengthened Jesus in his sorrow in the garden, may not I also be comforted and upheld by them in the hour of my tribulation? Does it not enlarge my spiritual apprehension to know that I am thus environed by a spiritual agency, and that in the rough places of the world's pathway they are charged to bear me up in their hands? Does it not deepen my sense of the love of God that he hath appointed to me such a service, and that my angel is now beholding the face of my Father in heaven—that he is there already in the presence of God, and by his ministry has been ap-

pointed to prepare me for that lofty station? I am, if a child of God, here called upon to wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world against spiritual wickedness in high places. That spirit of evil encompasses me everywhere, follows me into my retirement, besets me in the path of my daily employments—a subtle spirit whose capacities I cannot measure or cope with—whose wiles are to me unsearchable—against whom I cannot bar my door—who enters unseen into my soul, and touches and pollutes the very springs of all emotion and thought in me—who worketh in me unconsciously to myself, and whose agency is only manifest when it is too late to defeat his object. It is this spirit who now worketh in the children of disobedience, and makes of them his sport and prey, who reluctantly surrenders his hold on the redeemed, and ever seeks to resume his lost ascendancy—who assumes all disguises, and by the deceitfulness he engenders in the human heart, often makes the good appear evil, and the evil good. Against such an agency, the presence and power of which is all too manifest in the world, what have I wherewith to buckler myself? I have indeed the shield of faith whereby all his fiery darts are quenched. But then, what is this shield of faith? Is not the handle by which I grasp it the word of God? are not its covering and emblematic devices God's sure promises? and is not one of its impenetrable folds this very promise of an angelic ministry? These are the victorious hosts of the Lord, who have put to flight the armies of the wicked one. These armies have been unable to maintain the wicked empires on whose behalf they contended, nor could they stay the divine judgments which the messengers of the Lord executed. So I have in this warfare spirit against spirit, the evil spirit against the good. As

near to me as the wicked one, as watchful and more powerful than he, is the minister sent forth from on high, to whose charge and safe keeping I am committed, and who brings into the conflict the strength of the Omnipotent. He discerns the approach of the wicked one, and comprehends all his wiles, and meets him on his own battle-ground, and foils him there—more fruitful in good suggestions than the opposing spirit is in those that are evil. I see not, indeed, the combatants in this warfare, and am unconscious of the operation of any agency external to myself. It must be so, for that warfare is within me—in the secret chambers of my soul—at the very fountain of all emotion and thought. When the good or the evil has been developed in my mind, the victory has been already lost and won.

Surely it cannot seem incredible to us that such spiritual agencies should exist and operate around and within us. Such a truth is not more mysterious than the work of the Spirit of God, whereby he quickens and renews every saved soul. That agency is also unseen, unfelt, and known only by its results. In truth we live in a world in which the visible is neither the most powerful nor the most prominent agent. What are we ourselves but agencies, which, because we are possessed of an invisible spirit, exercise a control over all material things—that which is visible of us being the subjects and servants of that which is unseen?

Such, then, is the intelligent, active, and efficient ministry which God hath appointed for us, because he who was made a little lower than the angels hath been crowned with glory and honour. They worship him and they serve his church. Nor do they feel degraded by such a service, for lowly and poor though the little ones be, angelic minds are in such harmony with the mind of God that it is their highest pleasure to minister to those whom Jesus girt him-

self to serve, and for whom he willingly gave his life. With such a strong defensive army, then, hath the Lord surrounded us, even as he did Elijah when he stood the brunt of Ahaziah's wrath, and proved the weakness of his bands of warriors. He was alone, yet not alone, while apparently destitute and forsaken. The mountain also where Elisha stood was full of horses and chariots of fire; and thus girt about, he was stronger than all the hosts of Syria. So also the place of these little ones is always a Bethel, and heaven's messengers are swiftly performing on their behalf their errands of mercy. Most honourable and most blessed, therefore, are they. It is a contempt of all majesty and purity to despise them. Blessed are those who bless them, cursed are they who curse them. They are the cheap defence of nations, and the shield against God's avenging wrath. They fertilise the land which cherishes them, and God honours the people who honour them.

#### § 8. THE GROUND OR REASON FOR CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

At this stage it may be profitable briefly to recall the leading truths in this discourse of Jesus, that we may more readily apprehend the point and bearing of the statement he now makes—"For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." A dispute had arisen among the disciples as to which of them should be the greatest, and this feeling of carnal ambition was already producing among them alienations and heartburnings most hostile to their spiritual health. The primary object, then, of this discourse of Jesus is to remove the elements of that controversy, which implied the existence in them both of pride and selfishness.

By word and emblem he shews them, 1st, The nature of

Christian humility, and how essential it was to the character of his disciples that they should be disciplined to the exercise of it. The want of it was a practical renunciation of what they professed to be, and implied the forfeiture of their present privileges and their future inheritance. Without it they could not enter the kingdom of heaven, and could not be true members of the church of Christ on earth. He saw a little child among the multitude—he called it to him, and it came—he placed it in the midst of them, and it stood obediently there—he took it in his arms, and it rested there, feeling itself all along in the most gentle and loving hands, and committing itself trustfully to Jesus without a thought of itself or of anything else but of hearing, obeying, and loving him. This was the emblem whereby he taught them this first and highest lesson of the Christian life. This must be their position if they were to be Christians. It must be theirs to hear, to obey—to rest in Christ's loving arms—not to follow their own course, and to contend for their own interests—but to find that secure resting place—giving themselves up in trustful confidence to Jesus, as not their own but bought with a price—self-denied and self-forgetful—having this one end and aim in life, to hear, to obey, to love Christ.

Jesus then, 2dly, showed, in two ways, how this humility would manifest itself. 1st, In brotherly love—in their kind reception and entertainment of his little ones. That little one whom he had taken to his heart was as it were a part of himself. Its whole soul was centred in him—it had an ear only for his voice—it felt safest and best where he placed it—its home was upon his loving bosom. He had received it, and made it his own. To take that child from the place of honour and rest to which he had promoted it, was to commit an outrage upon his love and tenderness.



In this way, then, their childlike humility was to display itself. To be resting in Christ's bosom was the greatest and highest place in the kingdom of heaven. But to be there was to abandon their wilfulness and self-dependence, and to become really helpless little ones. Here, then, to be the least was to become the greatest—to forget themselves was to obtain the highest honour—to become Christians they must be wholly Christ's. But, 2d, In undergoing such a transition as this they could not fail to see that if they were thus identified with Christ it was because he had first identified himself with them—and that in loving and serving him, therefore, they must love and serve these little ones. To receive that little child from his arms, and in his name, was to receive him. Christianity was not a divided interest, nor the church a community in which men would jostle one another in the keen race of ambition—and strive for pre-eminence. There was one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who was above all, and in all. Christianity was the self-surrender to this blessed and glorious unity, the growing up in all things into Christ, and the edifying of his body in love, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, and in honour preferring one another.

3dly, Following up this course of action and sentiment, it was evident that all offences must be avoided—that their presence was an indication of the carnal spirit—of self-seeking as opposed to the seeking of Christ. Let them therefore remain without in the domain of the world—with the mind that is in the world, these offences must always be in it. Christianity itself is an offence unto it, and the sin which reigns in it must ever produce divisions and strifes. There must be a clashing of interests when each man seeks his own—there can be none when each man seeks only the

things that are Christ's. But in separating from the world, and becoming a Christian, you do not necessarily part with all that is in the world. There is a law in your members that wars against the law of your mind. You must give heed to that—to the body of death from which you must struggle for deliverance. The offences that are in human society all spring from the offences that are in human nature. You cannot carry these offensive things to heaven with you. You must, therefore, repress offences in their outward act as the most heinous sin of which you can be guilty, for to offend—to be a stumbling-block to a disciple of Christ—ruins you as well as him. It would be better for you to have a millstone hanged about your neck, and to be drowned in the deep sea. But besides, in order to be safe, you must deal thoroughly, searchingly, and honestly with yourselves. You must mortify your members which are on the earth. You must have nothing which you can call your own. Unreservedly you must be Christ's, and whatever in you is not so, must be plucked out or cut off and cast from you. Whatever seems to elevate you, what you take pride in, whatever binds you to the world and self, and separates you from Christ, must be given up. You must become a salted sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. First of all, a burnt offering—crucified with Christ—crucified in your flesh with its affections and lusts—in your carnal mind, your deceitful heart, with the manifold sins which have flowed out of them. All must be subjected to the divine judgment, and all of them consumed in the divine anger, which, as a consuming fire, acted on the body of Christ. And thus you will become, secondly, a meat-offering, self-dedicated—a living sacrifice, sprinkled with the salt of the covenant, and being made now gracious, you will have peace with one another.

For then all cause of conflict will be removed, and in recognizing and acting upon the privileges of your own relationship to God, you will also recognize and respect that of all his little ones. Yourself at the foot of Jacob's ladder, and enjoying Jacob's vision, the least of all the saints will become dear and honourable in your sight. They are heirs of God, and to them belongs the ministry of the angelic hosts. To despise them is to revile those who have been made kings and priests unto God.

And now after this exhibition of the nature of Christian humility, and the methods of its manifestation, Jesus sets before his disciples the ground or foundation of it. This is the special topic of our text, which we shall consider throughout in the connection in which it stands, and as setting forth the ground or reason of Christian humility. It is as if Jesus had said, this state of feeling which I have described—this course of action which I have set before you, your surrender to me—your trustfulness, your obedience, the loving confidence, in the exercise of which you hear my voice, and obey my call, and cast yourselves unreservedly upon me—this brotherly kindness, in the exercise of which you receive and deal with one another as belonging to me, and as identified with me—this denial of yourselves and self-crucifixion, whereby all the offences that are within you are consumed and burned up—this course of feeling and action ought to be, and must be, yours, *because* the Son of Man came to save the lost.

This ground or reason of Christian humility has a two-fold practical bearing. 1st, In creating and preserving humility; and 2d, In creating and preserving brotherly love; that is to say, it bears directly upon the very nature of humility, and then necessarily upon all its outgoings in actual life.

1st, Then, as to its bearing upon humility itself. The argument is plainly this. You, if standing in any friendly relation to God, are yourself a little one, yea, the very least—if possessing any interest in the Saviour, you were a lost one—if you are now saved, necessarily that was your condition. It behoves you to remember the hole of the pit out of which you have been dug, and not to be high minded. The confession that you are a Christian, embodies the confession that you were a lost one, and one having, therefore, no possible ground of self-exaltation; and if you have no interest in Christ, you are lower still, because you are still a lost one, enlisted in the most degrading of all service, in bondage to the most cruel and deceitful of all task-masters—under divine condemnation, and destined to eternal misery. But if the profession you make of discipleship be not altogether a falsehood and hypocrisy, how can there arise such disputes and divisions among you, as to pre-eminence and greatness? What have you that you have not received? You are not your own, but a creature of unspeakable grace. The Son of Man came to save you when lost. This was your condition, and what you can truly claim as yours are only sin and shame, nakedness, destitution, blood-guiltiness, pollution, and desert of wrath. Can you glory in these things which made you so base, and the possession of which has already constrained you to abhor yourself, and to repent in dust and ashes? Sunk in the horrible pit and the miry clay, was there any creature lower or viler than you? And if now you are clothed in white raiment, and have a sure footing on that rock on which whosoever buildeth shall never be put to shame, to what do you owe that position, and how are you able even for a moment to retain it? Is it not Christ that has clothed you—are you not just only in him—gracious only

in the effusion of his Spirit—upheld only because, with the helplessness and simplicity of a little child, you rest in his arms? He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.

The term *lost* has an obvious reference to the parable with which Jesus immediately follows up this brief declaration of the purpose of his mission. Those whom Jesus saves are like lost sheep. The sheep which in those countries wanders from the fold, and from under the eye and care of the shepherd, is exposed to the threefold danger of perishing from hunger and thirst on the rocky mountains to which it has betaken itself; or of dashing itself to pieces by falling from some precipitous cliff; or of being torn and devoured by wild beasts. And even such are the dangers to which the sinner is exposed. Wandering far from the great shepherd and bishop of souls, he finds himself in a rocky wilderness where there is no proper food and nourishment for his immortal spirit—in a thirsty desert where no water is, except that which flows from the smitten rock, and whose course he has widely strayed from—where every footstep he takes is precarious, for he is walking ever on the verge of a precipice, where one false step will plunge him into a bottomless abyss, exposed, moreover, to become the prey of the roaring lion which goeth about seeking whom he may devour. No sheep among the southern hills of Judea, or wandering among the mountains from the rich valleys of Bashan, could be more helpless or in greater peril than he.

But when a man speaks of a lost child, he means something more even than this. A child is lost when his affections have become estranged from his father's house—when the love which binds parents and children together has been turned into indifference and dislike—when there is desertion and hostility, instead of loving service and gratitude—when



his nature has become perverted, and the sweet fountains of affection have been poisoned—when, instead of hopeful love, there springs up in the parental heart the anguish of grief, and fear, and despair—when the soul of the child becomes darkened by crime; and guilt, and misery, following in its rear, transform his whole character in its external and inward condition into one loathsome spectacle of physical and moral degradation—then we say that such a child is lost.

But even this scarcely brings out the deep emphasis which lies in the word *lost* as it occurs in the text. All this indeed is true of the lost soul, but there is something more. The height from which the victim falls is greater, the abyss into which he sinks is deeper. He is a wanderer from a heavenly home—from the purest delights—the most blessed and glorious intercourse—from the wisest, deepest, most enduring love—from the source of light and life—and has become not merely a homeless outcast—a wanderer upon the mountains of vanity—but so perverted in his understanding and affection as to call good evil and evil good—to believe and love a lie—to be ever deceived and ever willing to be deceived—to be exposed to eternal death—to love the filth and rags to which his destitution has reduced him—and full of all uncleanness, destined to become a meet companion for the devil and his angels in that fire which neither utterly consumes nor at all purifies. Such persons are objects sometimes of abhorrence and contempt even to men, as was the case with those publicans and sinners whom yet Jesus called and saved. It is passing wonderful that he the holiest should do this for them—he who cannot look on sin, and who chargeth even his angels with folly, and in whose presence the seraphim veil their faces and their feet—that he should pity and save such as these. And are you among

those who have been so delivered, and yet are you not humble and contrite of heart? It is impossible. The fact that you were lost and are saved is an everlasting argument for humility. To you never can belong any glorying, or pride, or self-exaltation. But for that gracious interposition you had been there still in the horrible pit and in that darkness which is the beginning of perdition. If one found you lying helpless in the mire by the way side, and compassionately lifted you out, could you be proud of being so delivered? To me, saved by Jesus Christ, there can be but one theme of rejoicing and praise, one object of hope and love, one proprietor and master, one aim of life, and that must ever be he who found me, and bore me on his shoulders, and restored my soul, and replaced me in his Father's house. I am henceforth his because he made himself mine—a little one in his hands to be protected and guided and nurtured for eternity.

But, 2d, This argument of Jesus comes home with equal power as affecting the relations in which I stand to those who are his. It is this salvation by Christ which creates and sustains in me the sentiment of brotherly love. I cannot despise any of his little ones, and therefore will shun all causes of offence whereby they might be grieved or injured. They become dear to me because they are proved to be so to Christ. If he has set his seal upon them as his, they become mine also in the ties of a patient and everduring affection. If to me it should be an argument wherefore I ought not to be careless of their interests that angels have been sent forth to be their ministering spirits—if, as children of the supreme King, they are so royally attended and served, it is an argument weightier with me still that the Son of Man came to save them—that they have a far more royal servitor, who has girt himself and

has washed their feet. For this Son of Man is he whom all the angels worship—the Lord himself—the creator of the angels, and who in his love commissions them on their errands of mercy—even he who stood at the top of Jacob's ladder in his radiant glory, gracious even as thus revealed and sending his winged messengers to fulfil his generous purposes—but more graciously manifested now that he has become man, the Son of Man—that he has himself descended that ladder, not merely to convey some needed message to the poor and perishing, but to become himself one of them. This is his coming to the lost. He not merely willed and commanded that they should be saved, but himself came to do it.

Look, then, ye ambitious and proud disciples, at that Son of Man whom yourselves have acknowledged to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, the brightness of whose glory some of you have seen on the Mount and were afraid to look upon. He stands there in as poor a guise as you—the meekest and lowliest of you all. What pains he hath taken to serve you—what weariness and hunger and fainting—what unceasing toil has he endured, hunting you on the dark mountains—what utter destitution of all earthly comfort and honour has he suffered. The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. Even thus it is with him who is the world's maker. Truly he hath *come* to you, and come from afar. Who can measure the depth of his descent? He hath placed himself beside you, in your very nature—the Son of Man, your servant and Saviour. It was thus alone that his work could be accomplished. Your criminality had resulted in your imprisonment—you were shut up there, charged with many capital offences, and you were but waiting the time of your execution, the infliction of the just

penalty of eternal death. He hath come into your prison house, to become your companion in this deep tribulation of yours, and that not merely to speak soothing words to you, to lighten the agony of your despair, but himself to take the burden of your guilt, and to underlie its sentence. He so humbles himself to serve you—he takes these chains which bind you—assumes your entire responsibility—and behold the prison doors to you are open, and you stand free of charge—just and delivered from condemnation. He hath come to you as sold under sin—captives and slaves under the most grinding bondage. He hath entered into your captivity that he might break its bonds. He takes upon himself your servitude, and bids you go free. <sup>1</sup> The Son of Man has indeed *come*—come to save, and has been proclaiming to you *how*, has told you what your deliverance is to cost him, and you would not hear. You have not yet thoroughly understood how lost you are, and, therefore, what must be implied in saving you. Yet not the less surely the Son of Man, with a brave unflinching spirit, sustained and animated by a love which passeth knowledge, moves onward in that ever darkening path which lies through the valley of the shadow of death—your blindness and ingratitude not even deterring him, to encounter for you the king of terrors, and to take away his sting—to bear your sins in his own body, and thereby to save you—to meet all demands against you, and to satisfy them all. For this he is the Son of Man. He thus comes to you that he might stand in your place and discharge your debt.

It is thus that he has come to every saved soul. He has so served every one of them—entered into this closest of all fellowship with them—made their case his own, and delivered them. With such humiliation, with such pain and anguish of soul, he has borne their griefs and carried their sorrows.

Alas ! what a transition for him from the glory of the throne, and the adoration and songs of the worshipping seraphim, to come into contact with that sin which he hated so much—to become so vile—his heart failing him by reason of your sins. We laud, and justly, that self-denial and sacrifice to which a loving humanity prompted ladies delicately nurtured to become the nurses of rude soldiers when incapacitated by sickness or wounds. In what language shall we set forth the praise of him, who, being Lord over all, loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood ?

But more than this, how shall we deal with those for whom he did this great work ? That little one may not have much to me very attractive. There may be many things unloveable still in his nature. His position, temper, and outward environments—his capacities and information may all be such as to present to carnal minds the temptation to despise him. But surely it is enough for me that my Lord did not despise him—yea, that he loved him when he was unspeakably more vile than he is now. He who has such an abhorrence for everything that is vile took him to his heart, gave his life for him, and by that very embrace hath made him honourable, and hath left upon him the ineffaceable stamp of his own glory. Let us not commit over again the sin and error of the Jews, who, when Jesus came to them as their own, received him not, but despised and rejected him. These little ones are the sons of the great king, brethren of Jesus Christ, the children whom he hath taken into his arms and blessed. He girt himself to serve them, and I am honoured in becoming their servant too, and thus sharing in the ministry of angels and of him who is higher than them all.

For these little ones are saved, and have become the heirs



of a glorious kingdom. Christ came to do this for them, and he has not been defeated in his purpose. He did not appear in the likeness of sinful flesh without accomplishing his errand. Not that they loved him and called him, but he loved and called them, and lifted them out of the miry clay, and washed them and made them his. In saving them he has reversed their whole condition. They were lost and are now found—they were condemned and are now justified—they were children of wrath and are now sons of God—they were wanderers and are now restored to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Nay, just as in order to effect their deliverance he entered into their state, and identified himself with them—now, as saved, they have entered into his state and relationships, and are invested with his privileges. As he shared with them their humiliation, they become partakers with him in the power and glory of his resurrection. Therefore have they that angelic ministry, because they have become sons, and, if so, then heirs, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. They are the bride, the Lamb's wife, whom he hath promoted to royal honours, and chosen to share the glory of his kingdom, and even now as arrayed in the vesture of his righteousness, and as possessors of his grace, they, to the spiritual eye and sympathy, are all glorious. The Holy Ghost hath chosen them as his dwelling-place, and they are living temples of God. A divinity doth hedge them in, greater than that which encircles a king. They, as in Christ, deserve your love and reverence, and you are out of all harmony with God's mind if you do not receive and cherish them. It is impossible you can love and serve Christ without loving and doing good to them. The nearer you are to him the nearer you draw to them. Your resting-place and home is theirs also, even within the embrace of those arms which have wrought your common salvation.

His unity with them makes you and them also one, and ye are members of each other through your mutual relation to your living head.

3d, Jesus strengthens as well as illustrates this whole argument by the parable with which he concludes this portion of his discourse. Here, as always, he seeks to make himself level to their apprehension. He makes an appeal to their consciousness, that they might understand how very dear to him the little ones must be. How, think ye, he says, of such a case as this—a case which must be familiar to your thoughts? A shepherd has a hundred sheep in his flock, and he finds that one of them has gone astray. His whole mind and care are directed to that one. He is anxious about it alone, and so he leaves the ninety-nine and goes after it to the mountains, and when he has found it and saved it from destruction, it becomes dearer to him than all the flock. His pains and toil have made it to him all the dearer, and his watchful eye is henceforth upon it.

Even so it is often in the human family, that a sickly child which makes the largest demand on a mother's tenderness and care, becomes a partaker also of the largest share of her affections. Her days of woe and watchful nights—her sorrows, and tears, and anxieties—have identified that child more closely with her than all the rest. So also dearest to Jesus are the little ones who have cost him so much—after whom he has gone in such anguish of soul—for whom he has shed his blood. He left the ninety-nine which had never strayed—those glorious creatures of the heavenly hierarchy who need no salvation—the hosts of worshipping angels and adoring seraphim. His heart was set on that one creature which had gone astray. He leaves them all for the sake of it. He sees its misery afar off, and his compassion is stirred within him, and he goes onward to

the very gates of hell, and brings the lost one back, and henceforth, it is in a peculiar sense *his*, nearer him than the ninety-nine, and more precious. His love, too, like a mother's, is measured by the labour and self-sacrifice which its salvation cost.

And, still farther to enhance all this, Jesus represents this loving and blessed relation as existing not merely between himself and them. He has become the Mediator to effect this gracious work, but the work itself has its origin in the bosom of the Father. It is not the will of *your* Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. Because it is so, all this is done. These wanderers are not gathered back without his gracious counsel. He loved them every one, and therefore gave his Son to redeem them. His gracious affection went after them in their estrangement, and by his powerful hand he hath delivered them from the destroyer. And now he is your Father, as he is theirs.

This salvation, then, makes you one. You are all children of the same household, and heirs of the same glorious destiny. You have no ground of boasting against or contention with each other. Your whole history is identical, and is summed up in these words—you were lost and are saved. It was not your Father's will that you should perish. This, God reveals as his highest and crowning work. It is here that his majesty and wisdom, and love and justice, are conspicuously displayed. You would think it a far greater thing to be the framer of this wide universe and its Lord, and to command these hosts of heaven. But God is greatest and most glorious in doing things which seem to be the least. He concentrates upon that saved little one the treasures of his divine power and wisdom and love. And, mirrored there, in the salvation of that soul, they appear even to angels

far more glorious than in his other works. This is the true place of the Shechinah—the inner shrine within which the glory of the divine nature shines from the mercy seat. This is the highest temple in the heavens, within the veil of which even the angels desire to look, with solemn awe and bended head. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. It is to profane the temple, and to violate the sanctuary of that God who hath said, this is my rest, here will I dwell, for I have desired it. Your greatest and most reverential work on earth is to love these little ones. Not to love them is to take Satan's part against God, and to incur the doom of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

## CHAPTER VI.

## CHURCH-DISCIPLINE AND GOVERNMENT.

Matt. xviii. 15—35.

## § I. PRIVATE ADMONITION.

When Jesus says, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone,” he is still, as before, dealing with the matter of offences, but now in a somewhat different aspect. And what he has to say of them now comes most appropriately after the revelation of his own purpose of mercy. Those whom he had come to claim and recognize as his brethren had been full of offences against him, and he came to gain them, to take them to his heart as brethren—to save them, by removing those offences which had produced their estrangement, and would certainly, if retained, issue in their death. He did not look benignly on these offences of theirs, and by a regal act of amnesty resolve to forgive them. Their offences were to him intolerable, and he came to remove them. Their salvation consisted in the complete removal of them. The church which he came to redeem must be made a glorious church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. This was the final object of his mission to the earth, even to deliver his brethren from these offences. And he now exhorts those who had heard him, and whom he had gained, to go forth, and walk in his footsteps. He had taught them not to tolerate offences in themselves—not to be indulgent to



their own sins. Whatsoever in you is offensive must be parted with, however dear, however nearly it may seem to affect your life—the offending eye must be plucked out—the offending hand must be cut off—your members on the earth must be mortified—you must follow Christ into the fellowship of his self-denial and sufferings, and take up your cross. You must not bear about in you that which is a stumbling-block, and an offence to those whom the angels serve, and for whom Christ died. In the ivory palaces whose courts you tread, all your garments must smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. You must honestly judge, condemn, and free yourself from the garments that are spotted with the flesh. You stand not now alone in the world. Your relationship to Jesus has brought you into the dearest brotherhood with those whom he has saved. They who have rested on Christ's bosom will be tenderly regarded by you.

But though your first care will be not to offend them, nor to overlook their interests—while you walk circumspectly, so as not to alienate them, your speech to them being always with grace seasoned with salt—you will find that in this new and spiritual relationship another duty still demands your obedience. As you must seek the removal of offences from yourself, you must seek the removal of them also from the church. The judgment with which you have condemned all sin in yourself, you must apply with the same unsparing hand to the church with which you have become identified both in interest and in love. Your relationship to your brethren in Christ makes this course essential to you. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. The distemper which affects any part of the body disorders the whole frame. You cannot be yourself entirely free of offence if you tolerate it in your brother. The love

of Christ and his salvation demand this service at your hands. It availed nothing directly to the church that he was pure and spotless—that the prince of this world, when he came, found nothing in him. Christ's love to the church was shown in purging her from offences—in redeeming his people from all iniquity, and purifying them to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works—so that at last, when the prince of this world should meet them as their accuser at the judgment, he would find nothing in them.

It is this same service that he demands of you—even that you should walk in his love, and enter into his conquest over sin. It is in truth a loving service—the manifestation of the highest love. You then truly make your brother's cause your own when you seek to gain him by the removal of his offences, by telling him his faults between thee and him alone. Is it not so that Christ has dealt with thee? When he loved thee, and would remove from thee thy offences, did he not come to thee alone, not to speak smooth and flattering words to deceive and ruin thee? Did he not then come to disclose to thee all thy sins—to uncover before thee the recesses of thy heart, and show to thee its desperate wickedness? When he came, was it not to tell thee that thou wast a lost one, in the fullest sense of that terrible term, and yet, in so dealing with thee, he did not hate but love thee. He did not cast thee off and turn his back upon and abhor thee, and leave thee to perish, but came to save thee, to take thine offences from thee, to make thee clean, to gain thee unto himself. And, if thou hast Christ's heart in thee, go thou and do likewise. This is thy special mission to thy brethren, if thou hast heard the gracious voice of Christ, and hast been truly won to his cause, and art of the same mind with him. Hast thou really begun to purge thyself of offences,

in order to become a salted sacrifice, and yet dost thou not know what a loving and gracious service this is on which Christ sends thee? When thou hast been trying to look into the dark recesses of thine own heart, in the determination to make a covenant of peace with no iniquity, and to free thyself from every offence, hast thou not been overwhelmed and in perplexity, and felt that, in dealing with thy sins and corruptions, thou hadst to do with the most subtle and deceitful of all things—hast thou not felt afraid of a slight healing of thy wounds, and of saying “peace, peace,” when there is no peace—and wouldst thou not have regarded it as the truest kindness if a brother had entered into thy case and aided thy judgment, and faithfully discovered unto thee the plague of thy heart? Has not this been to thee one great use of the preaching of that word, which is quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword—piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart? Hast thou been seeking truly to judge thyself by that—to see thyself in its light? But then, alas! sometimes thy memory brings not to thee the suitable word which would reveal to thee that which thou hast not discovered. What a kindly office it would be to suggest that word which, by its revealing power, would uncover all thy heart, and enable thee to condemn and cast out whatever is offensive in thee! Truly it is one of the snares of Satan to represent this office of admonition and rebuke as a hateful service, when in truth it is the most loving and faithful of all services. Without it, in fact, there can be no true love. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? If one for whom I care not, or

whom I dislike, goes astray and commits a trespass, I leave him alone; but if my child be a transgressor, I cannot but reprove him. In the human, as in the divine relationship, it is love which lies at the basis of correction.

Having thus considered generally the principle which should regulate this service to which Christ calls his disciples, let us now look to the manner in which he directs them to discharge it.

And here notice, 1st, those to whom the duty is to be discharged. It is thy brother, thy Christian brother, to whom his fault is to be told. This direction, indeed, is not exhaustive. The Christian owes a duty to the world without, very much the same in kind, as is manifest from the way in which Christ proved his love. It was the lost whom he came to save, and it is our part too, in his name and by his grace, to save the lost. But it is not of this duty that Jesus is here speaking. He is dealing with the relations existing among Christian brethren, and the mutual duties implied in that relation.

It is necessary, however, here to observe still farther that he is not speaking of the brotherhood of the true and invisible church, the members of which are all deriving their vitality from, and sustaining to him one common relationship. These necessarily enter into his mind, and not only love one another, but hate all sin as offensive to him, and desire to be delivered from the love and power of it. Within such a circle of true brotherhood, the duty indicated in the text would be comparatively easy, for in such a case we would have confidence that every reproof we administer would prove an excellent oil, and every offence be sedulously rooted out. But it is evident that Jesus speaks not of Christian brotherhood in this restricted sense, for it is assumed in his argument that the offending brother may

not part with his sin, and so must ultimately be dealt with as a heathen man and a publican. But this can never be the case with the little ones of Christ. It is only thus with those who falsely occupy such a position, and finally go forth from the church, because they never were truly of it. It is therefore of the visible church he speaks—of those, namely, who profess the faith of Christ. These, as in the case of Judas and the rest of the twelve, all occupy externally and by profession the relation of brethren, and fall to be dealt with as such.

Now, in telling such brethren of their offences, a twofold difficulty presents itself. Confessedly, the purest of such churches have in them members who have not the Spirit of Christ—fruitless and dead branches attached to the living vine. The first difficulty then lies here. It is possible that you, to whom this commandment comes, may be such a faithless disciple, and have never set yourself to exercise this wholesome discipline upon your own soul—that you who are set to take the mote out of your brother's eye may have a beam in your own. It is evident that you cannot set about this duty at all without in the first place submitting to the crucifixion of your own flesh, with its affections and lusts. The right which you assume in dealing with your brother, you must grant to him also in dealing with you. If you are unwilling and afraid to look into the plague of your own heart, you will be careful how you provoke your brother to do it. When you are instructed to tell him of his fault, you are afraid that he will retaliate, and, instead of looking solely within himself, will direct his eye to you, and open up the chapter in his memory in which your faults have been carefully recorded. In discharging this duty, therefore, the only possible course for you is first to pull the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see



clearly to take the mote out of your brother's. If you consent to do this—if you are really single-hearted and honest in seeking your own purity and the purity of Christ's church, you will not be greatly afraid of such retaliation. For if, when you begin with fault-finding, you find that the accusation is not all on one side—that the exposure of your brother's fault has only led in the first place to his exposure of yours—what then? Ought you not rather to rejoice, if he shall discover to you some hitherto undetected sin? Unless you have sins which you are afraid to have revealed, and are not willing to abandon, you will be helped forward by such a retaliation. It is perhaps the very thing you needed to correct your estimate of yourself.

In any case, however, it is plain that this service demands singleness of eye. It is a formidable thing, by becoming correctors of the faults of others, to expose yourself to their censure. You may deceive and flatter yourself, but in discharging such a duty, you will be delivered at least from the flattering speeches of others. You set yourself thus to live under their eye and to be exposed to their censure.

But a second difficulty lies here—not in yourself so much as in him who has offended you. The manner of his offence itself may be such, and the whole spirit and temper of the offender such, that you cannot think it will avail anything to tell him of his fault. You may irritate, but cannot amend him. Such may be your conclusion, and therefore you may think it better to let him alone. Now this is the most unbrotherly and hostile of all treatment. If you deal thus with him, already he has become to you as a heathen man and a publican. Are you sure that you have a right so to deal with any member of the church? It is the church itself to which alone Christ has given this power. He has presented this very case to you, in laying upon you this

burden and duty of reproof. The fact that your brother may not, and probably will not, hear you, does not exonerate you from the duty of telling him his fault. There is at least a possibility that he may hear you, in which case you have gained him. If not, you must not let yourself or the church become partaker of his sin. If he cling to his fault, it is good that he should cease to occupy his false relation to the church. If you fail to gain him, you do a service to the church by ridding her of an unworthy member.

2d, Let us consider the nature of the offences to be dealt with. And here it may be necessary to say at the outset, that they are *not* offences, which, *in the first instance*, come under the cognizance and discipline of the church. It is desirable that this should be distinctly understood, for nothing is more common than so to misapprehend the whole bearing of the text. The offences with which the church, in the first instance, deals as matter of discipline are public, scandalous offences, to which this private personal remonstrance is by no means applicable. To regulate the treatment of these, we have another distinct scriptural rule, 1 Tim. v. 20, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," or, as with equal propriety, the words might be rendered—Them that sin before all, rebuke that others also may fear. Such sins as these are in the first instance matter for the discipline of the church. That which comes under the cognizance of the church, and falls to be dealt with by it, is evidently not such an offence as is indicated in this word of Jesus. Those then who complain of the discipline of the church, as if before *any* offence can be dealt with by it, the offence should be made first of all the subject of private rebuke and remonstrance, complain without just ground. The fact that the church is dealing with an offence proves that it is already beyond the reach of private dealing, and

cannot be removed by personal remonstrance. Christ does not command the church to go and tell a man his fault privately, for he commands nothing that is impossible. When an offence is told to the church, the offender must either hear the church, or become to it as a heathen and a publican. What the church means in this passage, we may have to consider more carefully hereafter, but meanwhile it may be necessary to say, that I understand it to mean the church as acting through and represented by her office-bearers. The trespass, then, which is spoken of here, and which is to be made the subject of private dealing and remonstrance, is one of such a kind as may be conclusively determined and settled by these parties alone—namely, the offender and the man who is offended. It does not come necessarily under the jurisdiction of the church at all. It is not a scandalous offence, but one of which I happen to be personally cognizant. It is an offence against me, and not against the brethren at large, and if it be possible to avoid it, I am not to make a scandal of it, but am to go and privately and alone tell the offender his fault.

But I observe farther, that when the offence is spoken of as a personal trespass, it does not necessarily imply that any injury has been done to my property, or feelings, or interests. My brother trespasses against me, when I see a fault in him which is against the purity of the gospel. As a Christian my interests are identified with Christ and his church, and just as Christ himself said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" when Saul had merely been putting forth his hand against the brethren, so when a brother has in him that which mars the consistency and beauty of the Christian life, it is a trespass against me, of which I am bound to go and tell him.

Of course such offences as these, in the first place, are not

public and scandalous ; but, secondly, they are such as are not consistent with the healthfulness and beauty of the Christian life. Such offences may be manifold. It is impossible to particularize them. They may be faults of temper, or imprudence, or some grosser trespass. My business is not to suffer them to deface his character, but to endeavour to deliver him from them.

3d, Let us now, then, consider the manner of dealing with such an offence. It may be best to consider this matter negatively.

1. Our dealing is not to be without charity. To fail here is to fail utterly. Better that the rebuke be not spoken, if it cannot be uttered in love and tenderness. We have no right to assume this function of reproof unless we have entered into the spirit of Christ's love. It is the fact that he came to save the lost—our belief of that grand fact, our apprehension of the mind and spirit which prompted it, and our consequent love for Christ and for those whom he came to save, that constitute our sole warrant to undertake such a work, as they should be our sole motive in the doing of it—our one object is to gain our brother, and not to exult over his infirmity. Our reproof must not be that of the pharisee, Stand by, for I am holier than thou ; but we must speak, as lost ones who have been saved by grace, in deep poverty of spirit, with the cords of love to draw the offender to ourselves. How excellent is such a rebuke, and how many might be weaned from their errors by our thus speaking the truth in love !

2. We are not to tell other parties. If our brother trespass against us we are to go and tell him his fault between us and him alone. This, indeed, is not the order of nature, but it is the order of Christian charity. The person in whom an offence is discovered is generally the very last to hear of

it. There is a marked preference for telling it to others. Such a course of action is simply malicious. It can do no good to the party in whom the offence is, nor can it benefit the third party to whom it is told. It is backbiting with the tongue, and doing hurt to our neighbour. How much of the scandal which circulates from mouth to mouth would disappear were the rule of the text universally observed—did there exist, that is to say, a real desire to remove an offence from our brother. But scandal lives and feeds upon the very opposite desire, that, namely, of elevating ourselves by the depreciation of others. It is an ambition which after all disappoints and defeats itself, for he who has always something depreciatory to say of others can never stand very high even in men's esteem. They instinctively know that the same course will be pursued in reference to themselves, and they cannot therefore love or have confidence in the retailer of scandal.

3. We are not to leave an offence in our brother unnoticed and unreprieved. This is the course which we are commonly tempted to adopt. We say the offence is not ours, and why should we have any concern with it, and incur the hazard of having our admonition ignominiously rejected, or of stirring up the hatred of our brother against us? We think it therefore safest, as it is certainly easiest, to let him alone. This is a temptation which must be resisted. Satan always triumphs when such a suggestion is obeyed. Christian brethren, in such a case, instead of being united in one body, having a common interest and feelings as members of the same body, become alienated and estranged from each other, and, moreover, also from Christ. For we cannot live close to Christ without the exercise of brotherly love. This is the test and manifestation of the Christian spirit—of the mind that was in Jesus. To leave a brother's



offence untouched is, in the first place, to treat him already as a heathen man and a publican, and before having proved him and sought to gain him, to cease from brotherly intercourse and confidence in him. This is most unjust and injurious both to him and to us. By acting on Christ's command in the text we might have awakened his conscience, and delivered him from his trespass, and bound him cordially both to ourselves and to the church. We injure ourselves by refusing to act thus, and our unfaithfulness and disobedience to Christ shuts us out not only from much endearing Christian fellowship, but forms the inlet to that spirit of hypocrisy which may ultimately be ruinous to the soul. In the second place, by not reproving the trespass of our brother, we make ourselves partakers of his sin. The wound which we do not seek to heal we are instrumental in perpetuating. We take upon our own shoulders the sin which we do not try to remove. Let us seek to be faithful in this matter, and walk in obedience to the Lord, with all lowliness and simplicity of spirit. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother and not suffer sin upon him."

## § II. FURTHER STEPS FOR PURGING OFFENCES.

All means must be used and exhausted to purge the church of offences. The church is not a mere society associated for certain purposes, meeting occasionally, and its members having nothing further to do with each other. It is one body whose vitality is in Christ, in whom its members are brought into the closest of all kinds of fellowship. They are more closely united than even the members of the same family. They have not only a com-

mon interest and destiny, but a common life. They are members one of another, and stand related to each other as the organs of the same body do. Each individual, therefore, has a direct and personal interest in the spiritual health and soundness of all the other members. What injuriously affects their well-being injures him also. Their well-being communicates a healthful vitality and energy to him. But more than this, the glory of Christ, as manifested on the earth, is through the church, which is his body. She is his witness on the earth, and according to her works of faith and labours of love will Christ be honoured and glorified in the world. The honour of Christ is concerned in the spirit and conduct which those who profess his name manifest. In Christian charity we assume that the members of the church are members also of Christ, and so they are united to us in the closest and most endearing bonds. Brotherly love, therefore, demands of us that we should not suffer sin upon our brother. Whatever in him I see to be offensive, and contrary to the law of the Christian life, it is my duty to seek to remove, not in the spirit of judgment but of love, not assuming myself to be better than he, but in charity helping him to get quit of what trespass I see to be in him. I am to do this on the full understanding that he is entitled and bound to perform the same brotherly office to me, and to help me with the removal of my offences.

As Christians, even the truest and best of them, are placed in this world, one great part of their work must be the removal of offences. Studiously and unreservedly they are to set about this work within themselves, mortifying their members which are upon the earth, but they are also to be mutually helpful to each other in this battle against the devil, and the world, and the flesh. In this militant

work it especially behoves them to stand shoulder to shoulder, as soldiers in serried ranks fighting against a common enemy, and with the courage of those who sustain the battle under a victorious general. If the enemy gains an advantage over my fellow-soldier I must not suffer him to fall unaided. I must help him in his conflict and beat off the foe. Those offences that wound him are my enemies as well as his. I must, therefore, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.

The first step in this healing process has been already described. I am to go alone to my brother and tell him of the offence which I have observed in him. If he have in him the meek, humble, contrite spirit of a Christian, I shall find him as anxious to get quit of his offence as I am. I shall gain him by the discharge of this kindly office—gain his love to me, and his consistent and pure service to the church.

It is possible, however, that I may find him not willing to listen to me, and that from one of two causes. Either he may be convinced that the offence with which I charge him is not an offence at all ; or he may be determined not to give it up because he loves it. It does not necessarily follow that every thing which I believe to be an offence is really such. When I go to take the mote out of my brother's eye, it may be that there is a beam in my own eye, which hinders me from seeing clearly. It is quite possible that what I designate as an offence, may be rather a singular excellence and virtue. It does not, therefore, follow that when I have gone alone and charged my brother with an offence, and found him deaf to my remonstrances, that he is obstinately wedded to his sin. There is evidently another alternative. Either, on the one hand, it may not be really an offence ; or at least, on the other, I may fail

in convincing him that it is. The text assumes that the trespass is a real, and not an imaginary one, and in dealing with this matter, therefore, it will complicate the subject less to assume that it is so. But my brother is not necessarily bound to believe me when I say that it is. If he is not at once convinced, it is my duty to prove to him his offence, and this is the second step in the healing process. I am directed to take with me one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

It is important to notice what it is that these witnesses are called in to establish. It is not the fact that a certain thing has been done, but the fact that it is an offence or trespass. It is assumed throughout that the fact itself is indubitable, and admitted. In such brotherly dealing it is something else that may need to be established. My brother may admit the fact, but may deny the wrongness of it, and justify what he has done. This, indeed, is evidently the assumption of the text, because the case is private in its nature. It is not a public, scandalous offence; capable of legal proof, with which I am called so to deal. Such a case falls at once under the cognizance of the church. My brother, for example, may have been angry with me, and spoken unadvisedly with his lips. I go and remonstrate with him for this offence; and he refuses to hear me, and justifies his conduct. There are no witnesses of the fact, and my brother does not dispute it. I testify to him that it is an offence, but he refuses to regard it as such. It is then and in these circumstances that I am to adduce my witnesses, not to establish the fact, but to establish my judgment regarding its nature. I am to return to him with these witnesses, in order to establish my verdict. The use of their testimony added to my own, is to convince him

that he has erred, that his plea of justification ought not to be sustained. He might with some show of reason resist my unaided testimony, for his witness may be assumed in the first instance to be as good as mine, and it may be alleged that neither he nor I, as the offender and the offended, are the best evidence as to the moral character of the action in question. I am then to bring one or two more, who have no farther interest in the matter than their common concern for the purity of Christ's house, to pronounce their judgment on the nature of the action, and, if possible, to convince him that he has sinned.

It is here worthy of being noticed, that I am not directed to do what very often is done in such cases, to the injury of Christian brotherhood, and to the perpetuation and increase of offences. It is commonly believed, or at least men act as if they believed, that when I have gone and spoken to my brother of his offence, and he has refused to hear me, I may then go and speak of it to whom I please, with a view at once of exposing his trespass, and of vindicating myself. This course of action is not the brotherly treatment which the text commands and inculcates. I am not at liberty to go to one or two and make my statement of the case to them, and engage their sympathies in my behalf, and obtain their favourable opinion, and then glory over my brother's infirmity. I am warranted to do nothing in the matter directly for myself. My business is solely to remove this offence from my brother. My remonstrance and appeal must be repeated in his presence alone, and before these witnesses whom I have brought with me. Hearing the case there and thus, they are to judge of it, and give their verdict whether this be an offence which ought to be removed.

Such a course of action, if my brother be really pure



hearted, and wish to free himself from all iniquity—from becoming a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, will, in ordinary cases, be effectual. While my brother might, perhaps reasonably enough, refuse to listen to my testimony, he will scarcely dispute that of Christian brethren, who are competent to judge, and in circumstances to judge impartially. He will rather call in question his own previous judgment, than their more deliberate and unimpassioned verdict. He must either be very sure that he is right, or thoroughly wedded to his offence, if the matter do not terminate here.

Even yet, however, if he do not after all confess, and repent of his trespass, I am not warranted to give him up, and to treat him no longer as a brother, but as an alien and a stranger. There is, then, another step which it is demanded of me to take. I must in no wise suffer sin to be upon my brother. It is assumed in this whole process that my one object is to remove this. It is not a case in which I am seeking compensation for wrong done to me, or a case in which my aim is to vindicate my own character and judgment. So far as I am concerned I could have let the matter alone, but my love to my brother would not suffer me, to permit him, if I could help it, to retain his offence. But now, having gone thus far in the matter, I am bound to take the final step. My brother has stood out against the testimony I have hitherto brought to bear upon his case, and nothing remains for me but to tell it to the church: “But if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.”

Here the question arises, who are the church? The meaning which is attached to this term in the text will vary with the form and order of church government which men may have adopted. Some would say that by the church

is meant the Pope—some, an Archbishop or Bishop—some, the Kirk-Session or Consistory—some, the congregation to which the offending party belongs. Nor would it be possible from this text alone to determine which of these parties were right. Evidently this cannot be regarded as a crucial text, which conclusively determines any question of church government.

So far as it is concerned, the Congregationalist would have most plausibility on his side, because evidently the literality of the text favours him, if he should contend that the church meant its whole membership. This is the ordinary, though certainly not the exclusive use of the term. For the word church is not always synonymous with the word congregation. It signifies sometimes all professed Christians in any one country. It means more frequently still, all professed Christians everywhere. But the term church, moreover, does not necessarily signify its membership. It may mean those who at once represent and rule over them, and who express and give effect to their judgments. We may adduce one example of this use of language, which should be sufficient to set this question at rest. We find the following direction given regarding the treatment of the manslayer in Israel, who had fled to one of the cities of refuge. Numb. xxxv. 24, "The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments, and the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled, and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil." Compare now with this direction the parallel one, Deut. xix. 11, "But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally

that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die." The judgment which in the one passage is said to be in the hands of the congregation, is in the other represented as being in the hands of the elders. Evidently what the elders did was held and represented as the deed of the congregation.

But it is scarcely necessary to adduce examples of a use of language which is so common. That which the government of a country does is represented as the deed of the nation—that which an army does as the deed of the general.

When, therefore, the direction is here given, "tell it unto the church," the church must be held to mean the governing or ruling body in it—the body which judges causes, and executes sentences. The text does not necessarily determine who these are. The form of the government must be determined by other evidence, into which we are at present not called upon to enter. It is sufficient for our purpose to vindicate our right to use this text as implying an appeal to the office-bearers or elders of the church, though we may remark in passing that the Presbyterian form of church government, implying the right of appeal to the General Assembly, comes far nearer the primary and radical idea of an appeal to the church than any other form of church government admits of.

To carry such a case to the church is obviously the final step. We can go no farther for the removal of the offence. But when the case comes this length, it is evident that there is a twofold possibility—either that the offender will hear the church, or that he will refuse. The church's judgment in either case must be final and authoritative. The offender must submit to that judgment, or be separated from the church.

He may either be persuaded that the accusation against him is not an offence, or though an offence, he may not choose to abandon it; or, he may be at length convinced of his trespass, and confess and repent of it, and so be restored again in the spirit of meekness.

All these possibilities have been frequently realized in the history of the church. Even on the first supposition a man is not bound to submit his own judgment and conscience to the authority of the church. If he be clear that what has been charged against him as an offence is not really such, but, on the contrary, a thing which the word of God has bound him to do, he cannot with a good conscience submit, but still he must needs be cut off from the fellowship of the church. There is always a possibility that he may be right and the church wrong. We cannot doubt that the Jewish Church erred when it excluded the apostles of Christ from its synagogues—that the Church of Rome erred when it excommunicated Luther and the reformers. That which was the highest duty had become to these churches the deadliest offence. But when one takes up the position which these men did, he must necessarily form this judgment concerning the church—even that it has ceased to be animated and directed by the Spirit of Christ, and that it has become a synagogue of Satan and an antichrist. In such circumstances, apart entirely from the church's censure, it would be his duty to come out from it and to be separate, lest he should become a partaker of its plagues. It does not follow that any society bearing the name of a church has its sentences ratified and sealed in heaven. Every such society may become in turn antichristian, and condemn that which most of all it should encourage. It is that which God's word binds which remains bound, and that which it looses is set free.

But while the church thus may err, so doubtless may the individual whom she judges. Nay, an error in the latter case is far more probable. Error in the church presupposes a general corruption, and the withdrawal of the Divine Spirit ; error in the individual must be of daily occurrence. Such obstinate error as is here pointed at, when he who has transgressed refuses even to hear the church, in all ordinary cases, argues a rooted love of sin, and the determination not to yield even to the authority of Christ, in which case the proper position of the man is not within, but without the church. Its members are commanded to treat him as an heathen man and a publican.

This does not necessarily imply either final impenitence on the offender's part, or persecution on the part of the church. Such a one, so excommunicated, simply ceases to be a Christian brother, but is not on that account shut out from our friendly regards or our earnest solicitations. He takes his place outside, with those who are already there. But how did Jesus and his apostles deal with the heathens and publicans ? They did not persecute, but, pitying their condition, sought to win and save them. The offender, then, who is excommunicated simply ceases to be regarded as a gracious person. He is delivered over unto Satan, under whose government the heathen are, but not on that account ceasing to be an object of care and of tender dealing on the part of the church, for the church, in fulfilment of her mission, is bound to go forth and to seek and save the lost. Such an one, indeed, occupies a position somewhat peculiar. He has been cast forth as a hypocrite ; and, as an abuser of grace, and as one who has already resisted many calls, and neglected all the opportunities which his position in the church gave him, there is less human probability of his being reclaimed. Indeed, generally the visible fruit of the



discipline of the church is not very encouraging, so far as regards the direct objects of it, and there are few services to which she is called which is less sensibly blessed for accomplishing its direct and immediate objects.

There is ever a tendency, for this and other evident reasons, to fall away from the exercise of strict and holy discipline. Yet from such a course there is certainly enough in the experience of the past to deter the church. Where discipline ceases to be exercised, the church declines, and is nigh unto cursing. Nourishing within her bosom that which she knows to be offensive, she is by a gradual but sure process transforming herself into a mere worldly society, and she must either deliver over unto Satan those who offend, or become herself a synagogue of Satan. When this hedge has been broken down, the church becomes identified with the world. In estimating the effect of discipline, therefore, we are not to look merely to its influence on those who are directly subjected to it. It may be that it will not save them and deliver them from their offence; but it discovers and casts out the distempered from among the flock, and so far prevents the infection from spreading, and thus bringing disease and death among them all. It is God's great sanitary law for preserving the health of his people.

### § III. DIVINE SANCTION OF DISCIPLINE.

When all means have been exhausted to induce the offender to part with his sin—by private remonstrance—by the united testimony of two or three witnesses, and finally by the formal judgment of the church, and all without success, nothing remains but the exclusion of the offender. The offence must not be in the church. If the

offender consent to put it away, he remains in the brotherhood of the church, and in visible union with her head. If he cleave to it, he and it must be alike cast out. It was only on the profession of his faith, which includes repentance, and the renunciation of all iniquity, that he came within the church ; and when he belies that profession, not merely by offending, but by refusing to confess, and to abandon his sin, he must again stand without the church, and become to her as an heathen man and a publican.

But the question arises, is this all ? Is there nothing more serious as the result of such a process than his exclusion from a certain society, and the giving up of certain human relations ? If this were all, it were easy to endure church censure. But the Lord has added to it a terrible sanction in the text. " Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In this matter it is not man alone with whom the offender has to deal, but with Him who has power to cast soul and body into hell fire.

We have already, when expounding the xvi. chapter of this gospel and its parallel passages, adverted to the doctrine which Romanists have founded on the text, and it is not necessary here to repeat even the general principles of the argument, whereby that assumption is overthrown.\* Let us here, however, trace a little more clearly the connection in which the text stands. It presents us with the fact that a marvellous revolution has been wrought in the position and functions of those to whom it refers. They are still, indeed, little ones of Christ, but in becoming such, they have been made the greatest of all. Coming as helpless

\* Vide pp. 64--68.

and lost to Christ, and entering both into the fellowship of his death and life, to them now belongs the kingdom of heaven. They not only have a place in it as subjects, but have been as kings enthroned in it. To them it pertains to judge the world. Introduced into the heavenly places, they exercise heavenly functions. Being made one with Christ he acts in and with them, and their judgments are also his. From their very first entrance into the kingdom, they are called upon, in the widest sense, to execute this high and solemn function of judgment. They have exercised it in fact in the moment of their conversion, and are ever more called upon to exercise it. For when I come to Christ I have become, first of all, a judge of myself—and that not with a human but with a divine judgment. I look into myself with God's eyes, and condemn my offences with his sentence. I hate what he hates and approve what he approves. Those things which were loveable to me and which I approved, I now loathe and cast from me—cutting off, and casting away whatever offends. And this function of judgment I continue to exercise, with the discrimination of the Holy Spirit, and in the light of God's truth. Whatever offence that truth reveals to me I must deal with it unsparingly and cast it from me. For me there is no alternative. I know that to me there cannot be fellowship with sin, and with Christ at the same time. If I am in Christ I have his spirit, and enter into the fellowship of his sufferings, and crucify my flesh with its affections and lusts. The offence which I tolerate and foster separates me from Christ. When I have fallen under temptation and have been overtaken in a fault, I cannot find rest again in the bosom of Jesus till I have put it away. Loving it, I hate Christ—hating it, I love and cleave to Christ. And throughout all this work of judgment and condemnation

I am judging and condemning what God judges and condemns. It is not my verdict which I pronounce against my offences, but God's. What I thus bind and loose on earth is bound and loosed in heaven. In my exercise of self-discipline and government it is this throughout which sustains and actuates me. I cannot judge and condemn of myself. It is Christ's cross I bear. It is the verdict of the divine word I pronounce. I know that these judgments have eternal issues, and, therefore, with reverence and fear, and singleness of heart, I pronounce them, not independently, but in Christ, espousing his side against all sin in myself, and guided by the unerring authority of his word, which is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

It may be, indeed, that in such a work I err, either by excess or defect; *by excess*, in condemning that in myself which Christ approves and loves, going beyond his word and becoming righteous overmuch, acting under the influence of a voluntary humility, as ascetics have often done; or *by defect*, in failing to discover or to condemn that which in me is offensive to Jesus. My erring judgment carries with it no eternal issue, and is not ratified in heaven. In such a case my approval or condemnation is not in Christ, but without and apart from him. It is the wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire will try and consume. For I become a judge only in virtue of my union with Christ, and my judgment is valid only as in him.

This personal discrimination and judgment lies at the foundation of all censures, whether private or by the church; and as they have the same origin, so they have the same validity and authority. It is a function evidently not pertaining to a class of men, but to Christians as such. My union with Christ brings me into other relations also. He

is not only one with me, but he and the church are one body, and, therefore, they and I have become members one of another. In joining myself to Christ, I have already judged, condemned, and cast off the world. I judge and condemn all of the world that is in myself—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; and now, as a church member, I cannot but judge them also, for they are of me and of Christ, and I must either become a partaker of their sins, or I must help to purge them out. To tolerate, to encourage sin in them, is to encourage it in myself. I cannot judge myself thoroughly and impartially without judging them by the same standard. They must either separate from their offences or from me. They have become part of me through our mutual relation to Christ. It is to make a schism in the body not to judge them, and my judgment here also has the same validity and the same eternal issues as in my own case. It is assumed throughout that I am standing in Christ, and using his word and pronouncing his verdicts. For here again, in their case as in my own, it is not my word or judgment which is valid, but that of Christ. I occupy the position of a judge, but not of a lawgiver. It is my function to apply the law as it is written—not to invent or to make the law. I cease to be a judge except in so far as I thus act, and it is only my verdict as a judge which Christ confirms and seals. Here, indeed, as in my own case, I am liable to err, just as human judges may do in the interpretation and application of human laws, but my errors have not the like fatal results. They do not become a law which the sovereign executes. His word is the one law of Christians, and it is only the judgments which are according to that law which bind and loose.

But it is evident that something farther is needed than



this, and it is therefore that the whole instruction of the immediately preceding verses is given. All the members of the church stand mutually related to each other. Were it not for this it would be enough that I should exercise and act upon my own judgment; and when I had discovered and condemned an offence in a brother, from which he refused to separate, that I should separate from him. As the case stands, however, this is impossible. I cannot be separated from him otherwise than by his or my separation from the church. He, while in the church, still sustains the closest relation to me. To withdraw myself from him is to make a schism in the body, and so, in order that it may continue one and undivided, the offending brother must give up his sin, or be separated from the church—from the whole brotherhood, and become to them all, as he is to me—a heathen man and a publican.

It is this which creates the necessity for a judgment by the church as well as by the individual. Not that those who act for the church as her rulers and representatives, and are the instruments of pronouncing her judgments, have any peculiar prerogatives and functions. What belongs to them belongs equally to all believers. Their judgment is no whit more authoritative than the judgment of a private Christian. Of the judgment of both alike, it is true, that it has eternal issues, that whatsoever they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what they loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. In both cases alike it is God's law that binds, and consequently it is only the judgments which are conformable to that law which are binding. The church, as a judge condemning what the law approves, or approving what the law condemns, becomes herself an offender, usurps the prerogative of a lawgiver, and abandons that of a judge, and there can be no ratification of such sentences.

If it be asked, then, whereto such sentences serve, if the word of God have pronounced them already? I answer, that they serve all the purposes which the sentences of any earthly judge can accomplish, and something more.

1st, Like the decisions of an earthly judge, they are the application of law to the case of the individual. The law does not apply and execute itself. The person accused is brought to trial, and, if found guilty, he is condemned, with an ultimate appeal always to the law-maker, if the judge has pronounced a sentence contrary to the law. So it is in church censures. The law is applied, the guilty is condemned, under the same ultimate appeal. The sentence, if it be according to law, is executed, and the offender is delivered over to death. The judge does not execute the sentence indeed. That is the function of the ruler. But he who is a heathen man and a publican is under sentence of death, a sentence that in due time will be surely executed. The impenitent sinner, indeed, is under the sentence of the supreme judge, even though no tribunal on earth pronounces his doom. But the church, in judging and condemning him, anticipates as well as proclaims the eternal sentence, and gives over the offender to death, and the judgment pronounced is ratified and sealed in heaven—the only question left open being whether it be a judgment according to law. How dreadful a thing, then, is it to pronounce such a sentence! How much more dreadful to lie under it—to be called even now into judgment, and in the name, and according to the law of Christ, to be cast out! This is not exclusion from a human society, but from the kingdom of heaven itself. It is the sentence of Christ himself against the offender, who, being thus shut out from the fellowship of the church, is also excluded from fellowship with Christ.

2d, Such sentences are not necessarily final and irrevoc-

able. In earthly judgments they are. But it is not so in those of heaven. The offender has, in the sight of heaven and of the church, become merely a heathen man and a publican. Visibly and confessedly he is out of Christ and unsaved, but he is not therefore in hopeless condemnation. He is not so likely to be reclaimed, indeed, as the publican who was never in the church and never acted the part of a hypocrite, but yet to him, on that heathen ground, there is still the offer of mercy and the call to repentance. His offences may yet be parted with, and his sins purged away. Even his trial and judgment—the solemn application to his conscience of the word and law of God—may unfold to him his hypocrisy, and reveal to him the hidden love of sin in his heart, and, by the blessing of the Spirit, may awaken him to remorse, and to that repentance which needeth not to be repented of. Surely such an issue the church may, and is bound to pray for. But meanwhile it were most salutary to bear in mind that, just as the minister in preaching the word is the ambassador for Christ, and men, in slighting and turning away from it reject and despise Christ, so church rulers, in administering the laws of his kingdom, speak in the name of Christ, and their verdicts, which are according to his law, are Christ's own verdicts. Theirs are not the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. The tendency of the time in which we live is too much to forget both of these truths: on the one hand, to treat the church as merely a human institution, and its sentences merely as affecting our social respectability; and, on the other hand, to hear the word as if it was a mere human philosophy. But, whatever men may think of it, that word preached is, every Sabbath, proving either the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death, and the church's solemn sentences stand recorded and ap-

proved in the books of the great lawgiver, and whatsoever she binds on earth is bound in heaven, and whatsoever she looses on earth is loosed in heaven.

§ IV. CHURCH CENSURES DIRECTED AND SANCTIFIED BY  
PRAYER.

“ Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” It is this which gives truth and validity to the censures of the church, and to the private admonitions of the brethren, that they are the fruit of united prayer. Without this they are the expression of mere human opinion, and may be the exercise of mere human caprice and tyranny. Professedly they express God’s judgment, and not man’s, against offences of whatever kind, and in expressing that judgment they are ratified and sealed in heaven. It is of importance, however, that we should bear in mind the proper foundation of church censures, and the whole theory on which they proceed. The argument by which their authority is established is by no means a complicated one, and we shall endeavour to restate it in the briefest possible form, that it may be easily carried about and remembered.

1. In personally becoming united to Christ, I become his unreservedly, to do what he commands, and to be where he places me.

2. I thus become bound to purge myself from all offences—to mortify my members which are upon the earth, that I may have fellowship both with Christ and with my brethren in the faith—to have salt in myself, and so to have peace with others.

3. In thus judging, condemning, and casting from me my offences, I use not my own judgment but God's. I prove myself by his word, and make it the discerners of the thoughts and intents of my heart.

4. Having exercised this self-discipline, and entered into the holy fellowship of the saints, I and they become one in Christ, and hence there is a necessity that I should exercise the same judgment upon them as upon myself, and in the exercise of Christian love seek to purge them of their offences.

5. In the exercise of this brotherly function, where the offender and the offended disagree as to the offence, the testimony of witnesses is to be used to establish it, that the offender, being convinced of his offence, may agree to purge it away.

6. Failing that, the church must deal with it, for in any event the offence must not remain in the church, else she becomes herself a partaker and encourager of sin, and therefore the offender must part from his offence, or be separated from the church.

Such is the law of Christian union and harmony. I cannot be in Christ if I cherish any sin which God's word discovers to me, and condemns in me. The church ceases to be Christian if she do not exercise the same judgment upon her members. The demand which Christian union must make, is that of purity and truth. God's word must be the discerners, and what it condemns, the church is bound to condemn and cast away. The church's oneness demands the same treatment as the individual, and she must be tried by the same tests. If my own eye offend me I must pluck it out, and cast it from me. If there be an offending eye in the body corporate, it also must be plucked out and cast away, for we are members one of another.



In the exercise of such judgment, because there is a possibility of error, and because that error must produce schism in the body, there is need for the exercise of the utmost caution. It is in the exercise of such judgment that the church, above all, needs to draw near to God. I, as a member of the church, am then called to the most solemn of all work, and that in which the clearest discrimination is needed, when I am set to examine myself—to try my reins and my heart—to submit everything in myself, not to the test of human opinion, but to the unerring rectitude of God's law—to look at my heart with God's eyes—and to pronounce his verdict upon my errors. It is then, above all, that I need to pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." For this function of judgment is the most solemn of all work. If in proclaiming the invitations and promises of the gospel, I need to have my mind purified and elevated by prayer, how much more when I am anticipating and uttering the verdicts of the great day of accounting—when, by the light of divine truth, I am searching for my secret faults, and putting myself, as it were, in God's seat, to prove and to condemn them. And if solemnity be due to this personal reckoning—if I must, with this feeling, judge myself in order to escape being finally judged and condemned, surely a still deeper reverence and awe become me when I am exercising the same function upon a brother. Surely here clearness of eye and divine discrimination are peculiarly needed.

If, in preaching the gospel, I am an ambassador for Christ, and appear in his name, and speak by his authority, and beseech sinners to be reconciled to him—much more when, as an office-bearer and ruler, in the government and

discipline of the church, I am seated on his throne of judgment to pronounce his sentences. In the former case I appear as an ambassador for Christ in the brotherhood of his humanity—in the latter, I appear as his representative and ambassador on his glorious throne. I dare not, therefore, enter upon this work, or carry it forward, without prayer. I need, then, to come into the closest conference with Jesus—to have him dwelling in my heart, and speaking through me—that I may indeed utter his judgments, and proclaim his verdicts. Without this, the government and discipline of the church is a parody on things divine; and the church which so exercises these sacred functions has well nigh become a synagogue of Satan. It has assumed a jurisdiction separate from, and independent of, the authority of Christ, and is nigh unto cursing. No such functions belong to the church. Her authority is based on Christ's word. Her power of judgment is derived from her living union with him. It is simply as a saint that I am constituted a judge. My union with Christ elevates me to his throne.

But then, in that real living union with Christ, I become a partaker of his wisdom and holiness. I have his likings and dislikings—and his judgment against evil becomes mine also. But evidently, in a very special and solemn way, I must seek to realize, and make actually available to me, this vital union, when I am called upon to exercise a function which is so peculiarly the prerogative of Christ himself. It must, then, be his words I utter, and not my own. I must get my verdict from him before I venture to pronounce it. To scatter abroad denunciations and threatenings which are not his but mine, is the attribute of a devil and not of a saint. It is not to repose, on the warrant of his call and invitation, on the bosom of Jesus, but to usurp

his throne. Then, therefore, and in the exercise of this awful function, it behoves me to pray in the spirit—to lay hold on Christ by faith—to have my will merged in his—to become a little child, self-surrendered to him, that I may have no word of my own to utter, but only Christ's words, announcing his judgment. To save myself from great guilt, and the most presumptuous sin, I need this. Never so much as then, when Christ sets me on his throne of judgment in David's house, it behoves me to realise my own nothingness. When he raises me highest then it becomes me to be most abased—to pass out of myself and into him. It is the blessed privilege of prayer that it can accomplish this. Having its spring in the Spirit of grace—in its outflowings, it receives this gracious return, namely, that it possesses the soul with the fulness of Christ—transports us into his light, endows us with his power, and realises that oneness in virtue of which he passes into our mind and we into his, so that when we thus judge and condemn, we are sitting with Christ in the heavenly places, and giving forth, with humility and fear, his verdict against offences. When we judge, we must be transported on the wings of faith to Christ's throne, and be brought into closest fellowship with him. It is only in the realisation of our oneness with him that our judgment can be according to truth, and hence the value of that word in the text, "If *two* of you shall agree on earth."

For it is the heavenly union which is the parent of the earthly. The order is, first in Christ, and then in one another. It is their mutual relation to him which binds his people together. Because there is one Lord, there is also one faith. The perfect harmony of two hearts in prayer, indicates that a higher union has been realized—that the same spirit is in both—because the same Lord has become the life of both.

This union in prayer is the innermost and highest unity of the people of God. It is not an agreement of the lips but of the heart, and of the Spirit of God in the heart of each. So much does sin divide and separate men, that when it dwells in the heart of any there cannot be this oneness and agreement. So sure a token is this highest harmony of the presence and indwelling of the Spirit of God, that when *two* unite together and can truly pray in unison for anything, this is from God, and is valid before God. "It happens with the binding and loosing just as with the hearing of prayer. It is valid in heaven only because it is the witness of what was already valid in heaven, just as prayer is heard because, by the impulse of the Spirit in faith, it has already come forth from the supreme counsel and will. All binding and loosing is accomplished by prayer, for the admonition is given in the love of praying faith, and the excluding rebuke is administered in the same love."\* United thus, then, they are warranted to speak in God's name, and to proclaim his judgment.

Prayer offered in these circumstances will necessarily have reference to two things—1. To those who are to judge ; 2. To those on whom the judgment is to be pronounced.

1. It will be offered for the judges themselves, that they may be pure minded in their judgment—that the Lord would pronounce his own verdict through them, bringing their wills and minds into perfect harmony with his own, and endowing them with the wisdom which cometh down from above, and which is pure and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruit, without partiality and without hypocrisy. If *two* are really united in asking this thing they are assured that it shall be done—

\* *Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus.*

that in thus surrendering themselves to the Lord, to act in his name, and as he directs—the Lord will be in them of a truth—and what they bind and loose on earth will be bound and loosed in heaven. In their judgment they will be true witnesses for Christ, and testify what is really done and recorded in the court of the supreme judge. It is on the strength of this promise that the church is alone authorised to pronounce judgment, and, consequently, no judgment of hers is valid which is not sanctified by prayer, and which does not proceed on the faith that it is heard and answered.

2. Neither is prayer to be withheld on behalf of the subject of discipline. For by far the happiest result of the exercise of discipline is to restore the offender. Before pronouncing judgment, therefore, it is a blessed privilege that we are encouraged to pray, that even yet the offender may be delivered from his offence, and may receive grace to acknowledge and cast it away, and thus not become to the church as an heathen man and a publican. The church is permitted to pray for such an one, even when she has declared him to be a heathen, and surely much more, therefore, before her judgment has been pronounced, and while he still retains his formal connection with her. Even then, and in such solemn circumstances, it may please the Lord to touch the heart of the transgressor, to reveal to him his guilt, and to give him repentance to the acknowledgment and putting away of his iniquity. At all events the church must be herself clear when she judges, and, having exhausted all means to induce the offender to part from his sin, commit her own way into the Lord, that he may direct her to that which is true and just.

Now from all this there are certain obvious inferences which have a very important bearing upon a very vital question connected with the government and well-being of



the church, and which we are not warranted entirely to overlook.

1st. It is evident that what in the text is affirmed and implied in reference to the exercise of discipline, is applicable also to all deeds of government on the part of the church. The text, indeed, only deals directly and formally with the exclusion or restoration of an offending member, but the powers implied and put forth in the exercise of this act of discipline pre-suppose and imply all the powers necessary for the government of the church, and which are essential to its organization. None of these imply a higher exercise of authority, and all of them imply an exercise of the same kind of authority. The admission of a member for the first time, for example, to the fellowship of the church—the dispensation of the ordinance of baptism—the admission into any office in the church, or exclusion from it, these are all in their nature acts of government and discipline which imply a judgment of the church and demand the exercise of the same powers as are put forth in delivering over an offender to Satan that he may learn not to blaspheme. All these acts, therefore, need to be performed with the same solemnity and fear, under the same sense of responsibility, in the same spirit of living and believing prayer, and under the same divine authoritative sanction. The church has been too apt to forget all this, and to act very much independently and according to her own discretion. Hence it has happened that her pure raiment has been defiled, and her hands unspeakably weakened—that those who are not self-denied and crucified have been admitted to her communion, and a continued love of sin has been reconciled to a professed love of the Saviour. Hence also, when the members of the church have been called to exercise the function of nominating to any office in it,

whether to the ministry or to any other office, prayer has been neglected, and they have proceeded on their own partial judgment, instead of seeking, in singleness of heart, the guidance, as they expect the blessing, of heaven ; and thus those who are not worthy, as being destitute either of the needed gifts or grace, have been introduced into offices in the church. How much would the church be purified and strengthened if, whatever the members or office-bearers are called upon to do in such matters, they were always to do it not only professedly in Christ's name, but knowing and feeling that they have no warrant to do it at all, except as submitting themselves to his guidance, and as having asked his direction, in order that what they do and determine may be his act as well as theirs, and only theirs because first of all it has been his.

2d. These acts of church government and discipline are not competent to a single individual. The text abundantly demonstrates this truth. It is the united harmonious prayer of *two* to which the promise is annexed. And that promise is followed up by the statement that Christ is in the midst of them, where two or three are gathered together in his name. This constitutes the basis of our Presbyterian church government as opposed to Prelacy. According to the latter order, the ordinary pastors of the church have no functions of government. It is the prelate alone who admits to office and to membership, or who has any power of excluding from them. In the ordination of pastors, and in the confirmation of members, he acts alone—no other has with him a co-ordinate power, or can exercise the functions of a judge. In the light of our text such exercises of judgment must appear, to say the least of them, presumptuous. Proceeding beyond the warrant of the divine promise, he cannot expect to have the divine guidance and blessing.

His judgments are not entitled to be regarded as divine, but merely as human. When the matter is rightly considered and understood, surely it needs all the fortitude which such a divine promise can give, to bear the responsibility implied in exercising the function of judgment, but when one alone exercises it, he goes beyond the warrant of the promise. It is given to two united, or to two or three when gathered together. Their judgment is warrantable and has the validity which the divine sanction gives. The Lord looses and binds what they, in the spirit of prayer, and in his name bind and loose.

3d. The exercise of church government is lawful only, as under Christ is guided solely by the authority and light of his word, and as giving forth his law. This is evident from two considerations. 1. The church has its being in Christ, and the necessity as well as the reason for government and discipline in it, arises from the mutual relation of its members to each other as forming one body in Christ their common head. But for this I am absolutely precluded from judging, and cannot do it without sin. "Judge not that ye be not judged." But if my function of judgment, as well as the reason for exercising it, is based on my living relation to Christ, and so through *that* my real and living relation to those who are Christ's, the fact of listening to any other authority, or of being guided by any other rule, than his law, of itself denudes me of my authority as a judge, and incapacitates me from discharging the duties of this office. I place myself thus beyond the domain of the church, and the circle of its functions and duties. My judgments have no divine sanction, and rest on a merely human basis. I degrade the church from being the temple of the Spirit, and convert it into a mere instrument of state policy. I subordinate it to the world, and denude it of its peculiar glory,

and secularize its whole character. 2. It is demanded of the church that she shall carry on her business of government and discipline with prayer. She must invoke the presence of Christ, and cannot otherwise lawfully sit on the throne of judgment, unless by placing herself beside Christ on his throne. On the faith of the divine promise in answer to prayer, I may venture to assume this function, and to utter those sacred judgments which bind in heaven as on earth ; but it is only by realizing the fact that I am seated on the throne of judgment with Christ, and am giving expression to his words, that my judgments are an echo of what has been already determined in heaven. Otherwise I profane the temple, and set up a rival throne in the house of David. I commit treason against the great king, and usurp his peculiar prerogative, and, reversing the saintly order, instead of casting my crown at his feet, I cast his crown at my feet.

From the carnal mind that is in man, there is ever a tendency to seek earthly rather than heavenly sanctions to that which we do and determine ; and so it has happened even in our own day that the solemn judgment of the church, in deposing certain men from the office of the ministry, has been regarded as of no force and validity, simply because it was not followed up by the deprivation of their temporal emoluments. And so, in harmony with such conceptions, these parties, while retaining the form of prayer for Christ's guidance, that they may be taught to pronounce his judgments, yet lie all the while under an obligation to regulate their course of action according to mere human law. Of such things it is distressing even to speak, and we are fain to believe of them that in so acting they know not what they do.

Meanwhile it behoves us to take heed, that while under

the restriction of no human written law, we do not bring ourselves under subjection to the unwritten, yet powerful law of the carnal mind, which cannot be subject to, nor in harmony with, the law of God—that, when we pray for the presence and guiding wisdom of Christ, we pray in singleness of heart—giving up our own will and prejudices, and passions, and placing ourselves in the hands of Jesus, to become his instruments in acting out his will. Then our church shall become beautiful, with a glory that is not her own, and the power and grace of the Holy One shall rest upon her, and salvation shall be to her for walls and bulwarks, and God will be our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death.

#### § V. CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH CHURCH-OFFICERS.\*

Jesus not only directs his disciples to invoke the divine counsel to direct their judgments, but promises his own presence with them. He assures them of an answer to their united prayers, and gives them this ground of assurance; “*for* where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” This promise has evidently, like that which immediately precedes it, a primary and peculiar reference to those who are gathered together for exercising the government and discipline of the church. But I do not at all object to its ordinary application. It is doubtless available for the instruction and comfort of all meetings of Christians, whether small or numerous, in all places, and throughout the whole history of the church. It enters with its rich promise into the family, encourages

\* Preached at the opening of the Free Synod of Angus and Mearns, April 1847, and published at their request.



the members of a household to unite together in prayer, assures them of a gracious answer, and stimulates them to faith and hope. Its blissful message is welcomed by the fellowship meeting, it unites those who compose it with one accord to wait upon God, and assures them of a special blessing. It bears its fruitful promise to the great congregation, draws the members together with the expectation of there meeting with Jesus, to hear his persuasive words, to behold the brightness of his countenance, and to be made partakers of the riches of his grace. It assures them of an answer to their prayers, and that those whom Jesus has thus gathered together shall not be sent empty away. They know, that just as the believer becomes possessed of all things in Christ, and because he is Christ's, so in that place where Christ has promised to be, they are sure to meet with the richest provision for their souls. It constitutes the great warrant and encouragement for all acts of social worship, and the fulfilment of it has been the source of unnumbered benefits to the church. Christ is in the midst of his people when they are gathered together, and, when assembled with one accord in one place, they agree as touching any thing that they shall ask, that thing is specially promised to be accomplished in their behalf. Herein lies the power and efficacy of social worship—a power to draw down the richest and most liberal favours from heaven—a power residing in it, because Christ is in the midst of his gathered people, by his own infinite merit, giving acceptance to their persons and prayers, and efficacy to their requests.

It is worth while to notice how entirely the realization of the promise, and the blessing contained in it, are made to depend on the fact of unity or agreement on the part of the assembled disciples. It is when two of them agree on

earth as touching anything, that it shall be done, because Christ is with his gathered saints, covering them with his robe of righteousness, and pleading in them by his Spirit, so that their requests come before the throne not as theirs, but as his, and him the Father heareth always. It is not for us to know, perhaps not even to inquire into, the reason of this fact. It is sufficient that so God hath ordained. Yet we may understand how, even supposing there were nothing in the fact of this common consent and harmony—the oneness of heart and mind which originates the same desires in the heart, and provokes the same utterances, there is, at all events, an evidence, in the very existence of such entire harmony of thought and sentiment, that the Spirit of the Lord is there originating and impelling their desires heavenward, making intercession within them, and thus that their prayers will ascend as a sweet savour, and enter into the ears of Jehovah. For it is only the Holy Ghost, who, by moulding diverse natures into the image of Christ, can produce that entire oneness, and consent of the will and affections, which combines into one the things of earth and heaven, and makes it true of the Father, and the Son, and the saints in earth and heaven, that they are animated by one will, and desire the attainment of the same objects.

It is also worth while to remark, that, as the fact of agreement seems essential to the fulfilment of the full measure of the promise, so the fact of being gathered together is made a condition no less essential. Jesus will have it, not only that there shall be a unity of aim and desire, but, in order to experience the fulness of the blessing, he will have this unity visible. It is doubtless true of the saints scattered over the earth, that there is among them not only a general harmony in the petitions which they present at the throne of grace, but that in this duty of

prayer, specially and above all other ways in which their religion manifests itself, this unity is to be discovered. Insomuch that it is true of many who differ much from one another in the forms through which they administer the affairs of the church, and even in the expression they give to the doctrinal propositions which constitute its theology, that they agree throughout, and are of one accord and of one heart when they are put in the position of asking any thing from their heavenly Father. Yet there is something lacking which all churches should aim at and labour for, even that they should be gathered together—that they should be visibly one, even as in heart and hope they are one.

The blessing attendant upon the accordance of two or three gathered together is exemplified in the case of the first disciples of whom we read, that these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Surely it is not irrational still to expect the blessing of an out-poured Spirit, with power and heavenly riches, to quicken, and renew, and fill us with peace and joy, and the spirit of wisdom, and the power of utterance, and to give us manifestations of Divine truth, and near communion with the Lord. The reason why it is not so in our day, cannot result from the faithlessness or slackness of God concerning his promise, but from the want of a perfect accordance regarding those things which we shall ask. But a blessed time is yet in reserve for the church, more glorious even than that brief season of jubilee, and this time cannot now be far distant, when the Lord shall say, Arise, and shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen

upon thee, and when the world shall know that God hath sent his Christ. But the manifested unity of believers is necessary to this result. They who now are separated not only by distance of locality, but separated by distances apparently far more insuperable, shall then be gathered together, not indeed in the same place, but their souls shall be gathered into one communion, they shall form one visible body, and thus assembled, Christ is in the midst of them, in the majesty of his power and the fulness of his grace. He shall have on his vesture a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords, and he shall vindicate this designation by causing all kings to fall down before him, and all nations to serve him, and he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. This view of the text opens up to us a very inviting field of remark and enquiry, and suggests a very extensive and important application of it. We must content ourselves, however, with having stated this application, and proceed to our more special object in the exposition of the text.

We have stated that it admits of an application such as we have indicated. It is plain, however, when we look to the whole context, that the promise contained in it has a primary and special reference to the office-bearers of Christ's Church, when gathered together for the exercise of Church government. In the verses immediately preceding, as we have seen, Jesus was giving directions to his disciples, as church rulers, regarding the mode which they should adopt in exercising the discipline of the church, and the text forms part of his address to them on this occasion, and in this capacity.

There seems to be need of a special promise to Church rulers to direct and sustain them in the discharge of the duties to which they are specially called. God apportions

his gracious communications to the circumstances of his people, presenting to each one those promises and directions suited to his particular case. Thus the persecuted have their special promises—the afflicted theirs—the mourners in Zion theirs—and here, in like manner, we have a special promise to church rulers. Promises of this kind, too, it will be observed, are always given to suit some peculiar exigency in the condition of God's people, for he does nothing in vain; and the promise of the text comes no doubt under this rule, and has been here recorded, just because there is something peculiar in the duties to which church rulers are called, which makes such a promise especially necessary. This need of the promise of Christ's presence in the midst of the office-bearers of his church may be discovered.

1. In the difficulty of the questions which it behoves them to determine. The matters that come before church courts are usually of an indeterminate character, in which the lines of duty and obligation are not very broadly marked; that which is duty falls to be determined by so many independent considerations, that it is often with extreme difficulty the path can be discovered. Here then, if anywhere, there is need of the presence and directing wisdom of Him who knows all things, to suggest to his servants the truth, to direct their minds, and to guide them to such determinations as He will bless and overrule for good. Were it not, indeed, for such a promise as this, I know not how one who fears the Lord, and has a tender regard for His cause could set himself to judge of a large number of those cases which form part of the ordinary administration of the church. In most cases of translation, for example, when the question for solution is, What is for the greater good of the church? there are so many complex elements which enter into the matter, none of which are thoroughly cogni-



zable by us, that it is frequently like solving a question in the mathematics, when the quantities are all unknown.

2. There is a special need for Christ's presence in church courts, from the importance and the extensive bearing of the results which flow from the deliberations in which they are engaged. In them are involved the interests not only of single persons or individual congregations, but frequently the well-being and prosperity of a whole nation. So long as it is true that the Spirit of God works through the instrumentality of means, so long and so far is it a thing of vital importance, that the organisation of a church should be perfect, and that the ordinary channels in which the streams of grace flow should be kept clear and open. Here, again, then, there is manifest need of the presence and directing wisdom of Jesus, that, in the general arrangements and government of the church, his officers may be kept devising all things and ordering all things according to Scripture rule, and that they may be saved from those expedients which constitute will-worship, and from which the Lord will probably withhold his blessing.

Even in those cases which ordinarily come under the cognizance of our kirk-sessions, how much need is there of the realization of this promise! How much wisdom, and tenderness, and faithfulness, are needed in dealing with the most ordinary case of discipline, both for the sake of the delinquent, and for the sake of the congregation! How much has Jesus left to the discretion, so to speak, of his officers! It is not here as in criminal courts, where transgressions are classified, and the measure of punishment is by law awarded to each. Here there are no such limitations, no specific directions. Here the conscience is to be dealt with, its state ascertained, and the means most likely to arouse it considered. Here no general rules are

possible. And does it not appear as if Jesus had on purpose left so much in this whole field of the church's operation and duty indeterminate, that he might keep his people earnestly waiting upon him—that he might constrain them to solicit his presence, as at once necessary to shew them the course they ought to adopt, and to give authority and efficacy to their judgments?

Now let us bear in mind, that, while it is true of all the disciples of Christ, that they have the promise of his abiding presence with them, and therefore are entitled to expect and pray for its realisation, that in no circumstances of their lot, and in the discharge of no duty, they may be Christ-forsaken, but, on the contrary, be blessed with manifestations of his glory, and gracious communications out of his infinite fulness; it is, at the same time, true, that when a special promise is given, a special fulfilment is to be expected, that Christ may prove his faithfulness, and exhibit the rich variety of his resources. Thus, then, it is, that in the meetings of church courts we are encouraged to expect the brightest revelations of the Redeemer's grace and power, and the closest and sweetest intercourse with him. His promise is, "I am in the midst of them." And, just as his chosen disciples, when he and they tabernacled together upon the earth, knew and learned more of Jesus than those who merely heard his words of wisdom, and saw his miracles, so we are encouraged to believe that in the counsels or courts of the church, Jesus being in the midst, we shall acquire a more perfect knowledge of his character, and experience more of the riches of his bountiful love. To us, then, these should be blissful places of resort, to which we go expecting to meet Christ. He is there, for he has said so, and is faithful; there, then, we may hope to find him, and to have our souls refreshed by his grace—

there to behold him, to hold sweet intercourse with him, to have our hearts inflamed with his love, and so to find it good for us to be in such a place. For, without doubt, the promised presence of Jesus in the midst of the gathered office-bearers of his church, implies that there his presence shall be manifested to them, that they shall know and feel it—that they shall behold him, and be admitted to intimate and holy fellowship with him—that there their souls shall be refreshed by his imparted grace, for the Mediator is present only to bless—that there they shall experience that elevation and spiritual light, in which all things shall be presented to their view in their just proportions, not as dimly visible, and portentously extended in the rays of an expiring sun, but projected from the back ground of a fathomless eternity, and illumined by its radiant atmosphere.

We are encouraged to hope, also, that Jesus will vindicate the reality of his presence in such assemblies, not only by giving truthfulness and justice to all their deeds and decisions, but shall send them forth arrayed with his own majesty and power, and render them efficacious for the ends purposed by them. He will commend their determinations to the hearts and consciences of men, and make them instruments of extensive usefulness to the church. Their judgments will proceed as arrows from his own quiver, piercing the hearts of his adversaries, and their counsels and admonitions will not be in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. All these things seem necessarily implied in the promised presence of Jesus, and it is needless to say, in this view, what solemnity and sacredness they impart to the meetings of church officers—with what reverence it becomes us to enter that place, of which in truth it can be said, “Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the house of God—this is

the very gate of heaven." What humiliation—what self-chastisement—what earnestness—what singleness of eye and of purpose—what prayerfulness—what zeal—what purity—what preparation—what concentration of mind and heart—are needed and demanded, that here we may behold Christ, and obtain the fulness of his blessing !

Does it not appear as if, in speaking thus, we had been dealing with the phantasms of imagination, instead of attested realities ? Does it accord with our experience that these meetings of church courts are fraught with such blessings to our souls, and to the church ? Have we known Christ to be peculiarly, powerfully, eminently, graciously there ? Have they been to us places of refreshment and close communion with Jesus ? Have we felt that enlargement of heart, and clearness of understanding, which his near presence implies ? Alas ! to a very great extent, at least, we are safe in saying that it is not so. Yet, here is the promise, and surely Christ is faithful and true. If there has been a failure, the fault must have been with us. If Christ has not been found by us there, it is because there we have not been seeking him. Have we not very great reason to fear that, in some measure, we have been perverting this ordinance of the Lord, and provoking him to withdraw his presence from the midst of us ? Let us endeavour to discover our errors and sins in this respect, and learn to estimate the ordinance of church government and administration in the light in which it is presented to us in the text—*i.e.*, let us remember that church courts have this special promise, and are to be resorted to primarily in the expectation of there meeting with Christ, and that for the purposes for which Christ is specially present with his people, and let us contrast this view with those frequently entertained of such assemblies by those who compose them.

(1.) There is a very prevalent notion that a church court is a place of business, and that it has merely to do with what is outward and secular. Now, it is undeniable, that there is much truthfulness in such a representation as this. It is, indeed, a place of business, but, then, it is the business of the church. It has to do with outward management and regulation, but so have all the things with which ministers effectively ply their energies. It has, sometimes, much of a secular aspect, but so have all efforts men can make for the propagation of the gospel. The truth is, that, strictly speaking, man can do nothing but what is outward and administrative, whether in the church court or out of it. What, for example, is preaching? It is an address by man to men; the words spoken may be momentous and true, but all its sacredness and power are in the unction of the Holy One. And what is it that to a good minister makes the round of ministerial offices and duties other than secular and soul-corrupting—what makes them to himself and to others refreshing and profitable? It is nothing else than the felt presence of Jesus, and the demonstration of his Spirit. Without this, they are not only profitless, but degrading, hypocritical, polluting, destructive. But, have we not as much reason to expect the presence of Jesus in the church court as in the congregation, or beside the bed of the afflicted? And if this truth were only realized, were Christ only manifested to us here as there, then our business would become sacred business—sacred to us and to the church, a rich blessing to both—our administration would be Divine, conducted in the wisdom of God, and regulating the kingdom of God—the secular would become consecrated—and what is reputed earthly, would be transmuted into the heavenly. The earthliness, in truth, lies not in the things here to be done, but in our mode of doing them. The distraction and de-



basement of mind to which they frequently lead, originate, not in the kind of duty to which God calls us, but because we do not realise God in it. Christ is not present in and with our souls, and, whenever this is true, we are all carnal, and earthly, and we transmute the most heavenly things which we handle into the forms of our own earthliness. It would tend very much to remedy this sore evil, and to reverse the too common processes of our church administration, had we but faith in this Divine promise, and patient hope to await its realization. Were we to recognise and realize Christ's presence in them, our meetings would not only be characterized by solemnity, but accompanied with Divine power unto salvation. They would minister the highest edification to those engaged in them, and not less to the church at large. Is it not well fitted to humble us, and make us ashamed that these things are not so?

(2.) Another evil, proceeding naturally out of that to which we have adverted, is, that the meetings of church courts, and the work done in them, are held in light estimation. This is an evil which adheres not merely to men of carnal understandings, but is in a great measure shared by men of a high spiritual tone. They regard the time spent in church courts as sometimes even worse than wasted, and their attendance as a bondage, which is felt all the more heavily, that it draws them away from what they regard as more sacred and more profitable avocations. Now, I am very certain, that were it made plain to such men, not only that their attendance and counsel were demanded by church constitutions and laws, having a Divine origin, but that, on the ground of the promise contained in the text, they are invited here to a solemn yet happy conference with Jesus himself—to ascend as it were to the Mount, and obtain a more intimate view of the Divine

glory, that they might go down again to the common battle field of the church equipped with armour newly polished and sharpened, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ; had they faith in the declaration that Jesus has appointed this as a meeting place with himself, they would require no other inducement to draw them to it ; for their most sacred duty must always be to wait upon Jesus, to commune with him in the place in which he has appointed to manifest himself unto them. Yet is it not plain that we have this promise ? and if so, then, doubtless, both for ourselves and others it is good for us to be here, that our minds may be informed by Divine wisdom, and our hearts enlarged with Divine love. Then, too, are we not encouraged to hope that Jesus will render our acts and deliberations effective for the highest ends—that not only they shall be blessed for the conversion and edification of individual souls, but that multitudes will be infinitely profited by them ? The truth is, that no ordinance has in itself a charm to work out spiritual results. It is the presence of Christ in them which gives them sovereign efficacy. And if Christ has promised to be specially present here, then he will manifest his special presence in the Divine and eternal results which flow from our meeting.

It is a melancholy fact, that experience and the warrants of faith come here into apparent conflict. Yet there is no real contrariety between the promise and the fulfilment. Let us go about any spiritual work without recognising Christ in it, and it must prove not only useless but hurtful. Prayer without faith, without Christ, without the Spirit, is not only unanswered, but soul killing. Preaching is, in the same circumstances, and under the same conditions, the savour of death unto death. Our household visitations bear no gracious fruit No one expects it. The evil and the

cause of it become here at once apparent. Why should there be, then, when we are summoned here to meet Jesus, to engage in work the most extensive in its bearings, the most complicated, the most difficult work—in which man is so helpless, so much in the dark, so eminently in need of Divine wisdom and love—why should there be less solemn preparation, less devotedness, less self abandonment, and surrender to God, than in our ordinary ministerial work? And if there be, where is our warrant to hope for fruit? It was a court of the church assembled at Antioch, and filled with the Holy Ghost, which devised the measure of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and separated Barnabas and Saul to the work for which God had appointed them, and in this measure resulted the conversion to God of many nations. It was the Synod at Jerusalem which restored internal peace to the church, and their judgment went forth with power and efficacy upon all, because it was the judgment of God. “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.” Such things as these we are warranted to expect, to pray for, to work for, because the arm of the Lord is not shortened, neither is his ear heavy. But these things are not done by the counsel or the might of men. They are accomplished by Jesus in the midst of two or three gathered together in his name.

But it is time that I should quit this field of practical reflection and remark, and turn your attention for a little to the doctrines which are involved in the statement which forms our text.

1. It is presumed that the members of every church court are disciples of Christ, and are gathered together in his name, to hear his will, and to act upon it. The whole of the address which precedes our text is to disciples, and especially is this manifest in the verse immediately preced-

ing. The promise there contained is not indiscriminately to all men. It is, if two of *you* shall agree, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. It is not two men asking which brings down such immediate and gracious responses from on high, but two of *such* men, of *you* who are in me, and acceptable through me. The same class are obviously spoken of in the text. Christ's promise is, not that he will be graciously and manifestly present in all assemblies of men, but where two or three such men are gathered together. The doctrine here then is, that the office-bearers of the church, in order to realise Christ's presence, in order to make their meetings other than mere secular assemblies, engaged really, whatever outward aspect they may assume, in the world's business, and which can only have temporal results, must be disciples—men in whom the Spirit of Christ is. There is no promise here to unconverted ministers and elders, and as it is true of such that they cannot without guilt engage in the performance of any of their functions, so here least of all. Christ himself bars their entrance. He is not in the midst of them, and they are guilty of daring profanation in entering into that place where he has promised specially to be. It is like forcing their way into his own house, and shutting him out of it—like entering the most holy place, in order to remove the mercy-seat with the glory upon it.

2. You are no doubt aware that the whole passage in which our text occurs, has been urged as one of the strongest evidences in favour of the congregational mode of church government, which in these two things is opposed to our Presbyterian system. (1.) That each congregation constitutes of itself a church, having the sole right of government within itself, and occupies no other than a brotherly relation to other congregations. (2.) That there are properly no

church rulers, the government and discipline of the church being in the hands of the whole members male and female. Their argument, as founded on the context, is this, that the case of an erring member is to be told to the church—that the church is to deal with him—and that if he will not be admonished, the church is to excommunicate him. The church, say they, signifies all the members of a congregation. It would be out of place here to enter into a full consideration of the validity of this argument, and we only notice it for the purpose of observing, that the language of the text furnishes at least a strong presumptive proof against it. For it is to be observed of Scriptural instances and examples, that though they are frequently capable of a very extensive application, so as to afford instruction to men in very diverse conditions, they are always given with such circumstances as to manifest their primary import and application. Thus, if in the 17th verse we are literally to understand by a church an assembled congregation, there is an utter want of harmony with such an idea in the words of the text, where *two or three* are gathered together in my name. Does it not appear plain that the whole description is applicable only to such a case as might occur in a Jewish synagogue, or in a Presbyterian congregation, in which the church acts through its representatives and rulers, and when *two or three* constitute the acting body? The case given is one which falls under the cognizance of a Session, and the words are literally applicable to them. Had the whole congregation been acting and judging, such a mode of expression would have had in it something incongruous. Not that we are to limit the promise of Christ's presence to sessional meetings. But it is given to them in terms, and by way of example, the inference being obvious and inevitable, that if Christ's presence is promised and vouchsafed to the



very least of our church courts, whose business is the least complicated and influential, much more will the promise be realised in the greater councils and assemblies of the church.

3. The doctrine is implied and embodied in the text, that it is Christ's presence in church courts which alone gives efficacy to all their judgments and determinations. Without Christ they are barren of all good, and unavailing for any other than worldly purposes. This efficacy Jesus gives to the doings and deliberations of his officers. (1.) By keeping them from error. There is no department of duty in which they are so liable to err. From the simplest judgment in the exercise of ordinary discipline, to those more complex arrangements which constitute the organization of the church, there is eminent need of the directing wisdom of Jesus. A word unfitly spoken to a subject of discipline, may produce irremediable evil ; a single measure wrongly devised may disturb the harmony of the whole church, and impede her usefulness for generations. How apt are such measures to be hastily adopted, which have a fair promise, and the evil of which is only seen in their disastrous consequences ! But while treading on ground so uncertain, and so full of pitfalls, we can walk with unfaltering footstep when Jesus is in the midst of us. Here we are like Peter, walking on the agitated surface of the treacherous water ; but if Jesus be beside us, it would argue the possession of little faith to doubt. (2.) Jesus manifests his truth to the officers of his kingdom. He not only prevents their doing what is wrong—he enables them to do what is right. When he is in the midst of them they hear, as it were, a voice saying, This is the way, walk ye in it. He brings seasonably before their minds the sayings and examples recorded in his word, gives them an

understanding to know what these mean, and makes light to arise in the midst of darkness. He not only gives them wisdom to devise good things, but leads them forth to act out what they have devised, in the knowledge and conviction that they are not human devices but heavenly plans, which have infinite wisdom and almighty power in favour of their accomplishment. Not only does he give this holy boldness and confidence to the office-bearers in devising, but he goes forth, as it were, with the device, and gives it demonstration and power. The duty which it inculcates is felt, not as an act of obedience to men, but as an obligation due to God himself. It is perceived that this is the thing which God is now calling the church to do. Thus Christ not only suggests the truth to the rulers, but commends it as his own truth to the consciences of his people. In these days in which we live, have we not largely experienced the Lord's faithfulness, in amply fulfilling this promise in both of these ways? Our church owes all its wonderful success to this, that Christ in the midst of the rulers has given them wisdom to discern the path of duty and obligation, and has gone forth with their judgments, and given them acceptance with all the people. Surely we have here cause of profound gratitude. Let us learn, therefore, the secret of our strength, and abide in our stronghold. (3.) Jesus carries into effect the judgments of his church officers, he not only makes it manifest that they are true and right, but he makes them successful. He inclines the hearts of the people to obedience, and to render, as unto himself, the willing service which he requires at their hands. It is thus in every age that Christianity has accomplished impossible things. It is thus that in our land the Lord has revealed himself. He needed the services and the substance of his people. He asked them, and they have been obedient to

the call. To those who know not this, our successes have been and are a marvel and a mystery. They are so to ourselves, unless on the principle that Christ has been in the midst of us. And when we look to this promise, the wonder is not any longer that so much has been done, but that so little has been attempted and accomplished.

4. The judgments of church courts, which have thus realized Christ's presence, and are acting in his name, are to be regarded not as the decisions of a mere human tribunal, but as of binding force and efficacy in the court of heaven itself. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." This attribute imparts to the decisions of church courts a tremendous importance. It is not that they carry in them certain results to be manifested on the field of the world, but they are sealed on high—become judgments of God himself—and he who has all power in heaven and in earth is engaged to execute them. Such a consideration as this is well-fitted to awe us into deep reverence. It is a very terrible thing, in a matter of this kind, to take the name of God in vain—to be any thing else than executors of his will. To act without his divine sanction is a deed of usurpation, it is to steal the royal signet ring, and issue our mandates in the king's name, when he has neither commanded nor permitted us. This is high treason in earthly states, and it is no less a crime in the kingdom of Christ. On the other hand, what awful import is there in a divinely sanctioned sentence, which bears upon it the seal of Christ, and whose issues reach unto eternity !

But it may be asked, of what practical avail is this doctrine ? Are not all courts liable to err ? And may we not presume in any particular case (whatever it may be)

that they have erred ? I answer first, that were the doctrine untrue, then there is no divine government of the church, all our acts and decisions are merely human opinions, and and it is not worth while for a Christian to concern himself about them. The promise of the text in this case would be a delusion and vanity, deceiving men into a vain confidence of what never could happen. I answer, second, that, in church courts, as elsewhere, men are liable to err, and when left to themselves always err, and God does not execute the erroneous judgments of men. He only magnifies his own truth and his own ordinances. The preacher is liable to err, and frequently does err, and the people are not required to receive his declarations as God's truth, but to search the Scriptures whether these things be so. So it is with church courts. For though Christ has promised to be peculiarly and graciously there, it is quite possible his officers may prefer their own policy to the simplicity of his wisdom, and his being in the midst of them is not for the purpose of making new and exclusive revelations to them, but to keep them within the limits of their commission, and in harmony with the written word.

It is well known that Popery has laid hold of and perverted the doctrine of which we now speak. It lies at the foundation of her tyranny over the souls of men. Pretending an infallibility in her councils, and the divine sanction to all her decrees, she has in this, as in most other instances, converted the mystery of godliness into a mystery of iniquity. The foundation of civil liberty lies in a written law, to which both rulers and subjects are bound to conform. So it is in the church. God has revealed, not to ministers only, but to all the subjects of his kingdom, his truth. To this both ministers and people are subject. Nothing is divine which does not emanate from this source, and is not

thus attested to be God's. Nothing is bound or loosed in heaven which the word does not bind or loose. Here is the foundation of Christian liberty ; and here is the safety with which we can admit that the church's judgments are of binding force and efficacy in heaven itself. This has been known and felt frequently by those who have been the subjects of her censures. It is recorded of Adamson, Archbishop of St Andrews, that he so felt the excommunication of the church binding him over to perdition, and could attain no hope or peace till he was realeased from his sentence. Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that the error here lies all on one side. It is true that all councils of men have erred, and it is true that there is a danger in church rulers announcing their own judgments as those of God. But the error, we believe, on the other side, is equally prevalent and equally fatal—the error of looking upon all church censures as merely human, and to be regarded no otherwise than as they may bear upon our temporal interests. The great majority of our people, and especially such of them as are subjects of ecclesiastical discipline, regard these judgments as the admonitions and warnings of men merely. They do not perceive God speaking to them in such judgments, and do not recognise the majesty, and power, and holiness of Christ in them. This is one chief reason why the discipline of the church is so seldom efficacious. It were well worth while to endeavour to restore it to the place it once held—not to be overmuch afraid of accusations of Popish tyranny and infallibility, but faithfully to exhibit the standing of this ordinance in the word of God—to vindicate its authority, and to show the guilt involved in despising it.

5. In all acts of church government and discipline there must be a court. Jesus does not promise his presence to



one person sitting in the seat of judgment, and issuing his mandates of authority. The promise is, where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them. It is almost needless to say that this doctrine is subversive of the whole system of prelatical church government. It is left without the Divine blessing, and it cannot plead the Divine sanction. The presence of Christ is essential to give validity and force to any act of church rulers; but primates, in their solitary dignity, are left destitute of this promise. Temporal power they may have, ecclesiastical power they may boast their exclusive privilege of exercising, but what if both be unblessed? To reach the enlightened conscience of a believer, or to convert the gainsayer, something higher is needed, which only Christ can bestow, and his promise is to two or three gathered together. Is it from respect to this promise that they require the presence of three bishops at the consecration of one of their own order? And if so, how comes it that they disregard the promise in all their other acts of authority and discipline? The natural results of such a course of action are obvious. It has happened, on the one hand, that their discipline has become utterly powerless, and they have willingly subjected it, as a thing human, to the arbitration of temporal power. I would not do Episcopalians the injustice of believing that, as a body, and for so long a time, they have confessedly subjected the administration of their church to civil authority, in the knowledge and belief that such administration is a really Divine ordinance in the hands of Jesus Christ himself, who has promised to direct and bless his own office-bearers in the ordering of it. Rather the case stands thus—Shut out by the very frame of their church from the promise of the text, and perceiving that without it all that is comprehended in the government and

discipline of the church is nothing more than human and earthly, they have left this great department of the church's duty to be controlled by events as they arose in the history of States. The only things they regard as Divine, and above State control, are preaching and ordination ; and it is remarkable that, in regard to the latter of these, they place themselves in a condition to realise the promise, and hence they have kept this act within the range of the sacred. On the other hand, it has happened that God has given, and is now giving, them to reap the bitter fruits of such a course of conduct. Incapable of action as a church—deprived of self-government—they are without any means of purging themselves from the most gross corruptions. The fences of the vineyard broken down, the wild boar out of the forest wastes it. Popery, and every degrading form of vice and error, obtains access into their pulpits ; and neither the purity of ordination nor of preaching can be preserved, when the sacredness of discipline has been violated and profaned.

6. Church courts, to be lawfully constituted, to be in circumstances in which they are warranted to expect the presence of Christ, the direction of his wisdom, and the blessings of his grace, must meet in the name of Christ, *i.e.* under his supreme authority, and prepared to act out his will. The promise is, where two or three are gathered together *in my name*. When men are assembled, no matter for what ostensible purpose, in another name, called together by another authority, and placed under other obligations than those they owe to Christ, they have no warrant to expect his blessing. The doctrine we have now stated comprehends these two things (and we must content ourselves with little more than the mere statement of them). 1. That all acts of church courts, the judgments they pronounce, the plans they devise, the recommendations they

issue, must be in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are met, if they meet lawfully at all, in the name of Christ and hence all that issues from them must come in his name. If their minds are rightly exercised, they know that this name alone gives efficacy to their deeds, and commands a blessing upon their plans of operation. 2. All their acts must consequently be according to the revealed will of Christ, else they are taking his holy name in vain. If they cannot show that they have the sanction of Christ for what they do, they cannot act lawfully in his name, and their meeting in his name becomes a mockery. It is this which so revolts the pious mind in contemplating the deeds and decisions of the courts of the Establishment in this country. The true test to which to put them, is to read their acts as running in the name of Christ, and to examine what authority Christ has given them so to use his name. It is true that they rarely use this name in their deeds and decisions, as if they themselves were aware of the profanity of such a thing. But to what conclusion does the inevitable omission of it, in by far the most important acts of their administration, lead us? Does it not necessarily raise the question, whether these be courts of Christ's church at all, seeing they are engaged in work in which they cannot plead the authority of his name? And if so, where is the promise and the blessing contained in it? What obedience is due to them? What fruits are likely to be produced? A Christ-forsaken court is of all things the most melancholy. It is a palace abandoned, and stripped of its gorgeous ornaments. Silence reigns in its deserted halls—no voice of authority issues from it—there are no messengers running to and fro on the Sovereign's errands—no busy hum of preparation. Interesting it may be as a ruin, but its name is Ichabod, for the glory is departed.

7. The courts of Christ's church must be constituted with prayer, and conducted in the spirit of it. This is obvious, not only from the nature of the case, but from the connection of our text with what immediately precedes it. Christ is in the midst of his disciples gathered together as church rulers, but it is for the purpose of directing and giving acceptance to their prayers. The things about which they are engaged have this security, and no other, for their accomplishment—that if they agree together as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of God. It shall be done because Christ is in the midst of them, covering them with his robe of righteousness, and drawing down upon them a Father's approbation, and the acts of a Father's love. A church court so assembled feels that it is helpless and destitute, without strength or wisdom, except so far as Christ is there, securing to them a Father's blessing; and thus knowing not what of themselves to do or resolve, they agree to ask of God, that he would tell them and send forth his light and truth to guide them. They ask the wisdom which is from above, which is full of mercy and of good fruits—direction in every perplexing path—light to perceive the way, and faithfulness to walk in it. All this is implied in the fact of the blessed presence of Jesus; and he is not manifestly and graciously with his people without putting them into this attitude of expectant faith. It follows from this of necessity, that a court so constituted can permit no other influence to bear upon them than the will of God. They pray to him to manifest this will, certainly not that they may overlook or trample upon it, but that they may implicitly act upon it. Their prayer would otherwise be not only an act of hypocrisy, but a mockery. It would be asking God to tell them what to do, while they were resolved not to do it. This, I apprehend, is the most

effective demonstration of the error and sin of Erastianism.

At all events, however, let us remember, that here or elsewhere, when we engage in prayer, it partakes very much of the nature of a covenant transaction. When, for any special cause, I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—when I plead with him, on the ground of his own promises, that he would accomplish a particular work, I am endeavouring all the while to *engage God* to bring into operation his power and wisdom to effect it ; and in the same act, if my prayer is not hypocrisy, *I engage and pledge myself* to enter every open door, to avail myself of every opportunity, to employ all my faculties and energies, and all gifts and graces he shall be pleased to bestow upon me, in the same direction, and for the accomplishment of the same object. It is thus that God honours me to be a co-worker with himself. It is this which gives practical earnestness and power to religion, and makes devotion the most energetic and fruitful of all things. It is this which shall deliver us from sentimental pietism, and engage us (while we are here to learn God's will, and devise measures for its accomplishment) to go forth with all our might, and, God helping us, to convert our purposes into deeds.

#### § VI. CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF HIS PEOPLE.

Keeping in mind the primary and more special application of the promise, let us now advert to its more general bearings. There are two things in it that claim our attention. There is 1st, a promise ; and 2d, a statement of the circumstances in which that promise will be realised. The promise is, "there am I in the midst of them." The cir-



cumstances are, "where two or three are gathered together in my name." Let us attend to these points in the order in which they have now been stated.

First of all, let us look to the *promise*: "There am I in the midst of them." And upon this observe, *first*, that there is a certain sense in which it is true of Jesus, that he is present with all men and at all times. This is true of him in his divine nature, for it is essential to our very conceptions of that nature to believe it omnipresent. Jesus unites in his own person both the nature of God and the nature of man. As man, he once tabernacled on this earth, as man he is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God, and is present in the upper sanctuary and no where else. But before he appeared in fashion as a man, he had an existence—he was from eternity with God—he was God—and in this nature manifested the divine energies of the Godhead, for all things were created by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In this nature he is everywhere present, and it is true of him what the Psalmist says of the Father, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Wherever we are, then, by night or by day—whatever we do, or think, or speak, Jesus is a present observer of all. Nothing escapes his cognizance, and by thus searching all things, he becomes qualified for the discharge of that last grand duty which is devolved upon him as Mediator, to judge the world in righteousness. And it were well that we remembered continually that we are never hid from the presence of him who is now our witness, and will one day

be our judge. He notes and records every unholy thought, every vile desire, every idle word, every wicked deed ; he is in the midst of all men ; very near each of them for this purpose ; and when the throne shall be set, and the books opened, and the wrath of the Lamb displayed—the fearful scroll shall be unfolded in presence of the assembled universe, and all secret things made known, and the memory of all forgotten sins recalled, and the wicked shall be sent to hell with all their sins engraven upon their souls, and brought to their everlasting remembrance.

It is very plain, however, that when Jesus gave to his disciples the promise contained in the text, he meant something different from that to which we have referred. There is a sense in which he is present with his people, in which he is not present with the world. And when in the text Jesus gives the promise of his presence, he gives it not as something which they should dread and tremble at, but as that which was peculiarly fitted to comfort and animate them. It was in this sense that God of old time was present with his people in their journeyings through the wilderness. He was with them as a guide in all the way, as a minister of their daily sustenance, as a shield against their most powerful enemies. It is the same kind of blessings which Jesus here promises to his people ; even to be with them in all the way of their pilgrimage, to sustain, and comfort, and defend them, and to manifest himself unto them in another way than he does unto the world, to show unto them his glory and the power of his grace. When Jacob fled from his father's house, fearing the anger of his brother, and set out on his distant journey with only his staff in his hand, he had this very promise fulfilled to him in some measure. When he lay down at eventide, under the open sky, and took of the stones of the place and made them

his pillow, his soul was refreshed by sweet visions of the divine glory, and views of that ceaseless intercourse established between heaven and earth, in which the angels are ever ministering to the heirs of salvation, and the children of God, in their utmost destitution and abandonment, are made to know and feel, that though cast down they are not forsaken, but that they have a mightier power on their side than all that can be against them. The Patriarch exclaimed when he arose, Surely the Lord is *in* this place: and he called the name of it Bethel—the house of God. Even so it is, that Jesus is in the midst of his people now, and amply fulfils the promise of the text. Though no longer manifested in those outward palpable revelations of his grace and glory, fitted to that state of the church in which faith had less to rest upon, he gives to his people a sweet consciousness of his abiding presence, which is not the less true and soul-satisfying that it is invisible. He gives the soul a nearness of access unto himself—draws forth its desires, and inflames them with admiration and love—exhibits his own infinite graces, and beauty, and fulness—opens the eye of faith to behold his unspeakable preciousness—brings into the mind the sayings of his holy word, with such sweet consciousness of their truth, that their hearts burn within them as they talk with him—enlarges and purifies their affections, and pours into them the refreshing streams of his own love, and thus establishes and maintains a communion with himself all the more near and intimate, that it is directly with the inner man, at once melting the soul with the glow of his love, and awing it to humble reverence by the exhibition of his glory.

Still farther, the promise implies a readiness, on the part of Christ, to do for his people what they ask. This will be at once apparent, if we examine, for a moment, the connec-

tion of the text with the preceding verse. The statement in the text, indeed, is given as a reason why the disciples should rely with confidence on the promise made to them. "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven ; *for* where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." That is to say, you may rest perfectly certain, that your requests shall be attended to and fulfilled by my Father, for I am present to hear them offered, and in the discharge of my mediatorial service, I present them before the throne on high ; the Father heareth me always, and the prayers of my people shall not be disappointed. It is plain, then, that the promise of the text is one of assistance, that it includes the idea of Christ's presence as Mediator, and prevailing intercessor, making known the wants of his people, pouring them into the ear of the Father, and obtaining, on the ground of his own merit, a favourable answer to all their requests. It may easily be conceived what confidence and gladness such a promise was fitted to convey to the minds of those to whom first it was uttered. They had forsaken all for Christ, and were following him as the Good Shepherd ; and from what they had observed and experienced, both of his power and his condescending love, it needed no more than the promise of his abiding presence to communicate to them the assurance that whatever their future lot might be—whatever the exigencies of their condition—they would be aided and delivered in such a way as at once to exhibit the grace and beneficence of his own nature, and to convey to them that efficient help which they required. And not less comforting is the promise to the disciples of Jesus now, for it is the very object and design of his presence in the midst of them, at the same

time to direct and to fulfil their desires, insomuch that, when any two of them shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them, or by them, either in their standing still and seeing the salvation of God, or in their being made more than conquerors, through him that loved them.

But again, the whole richness of the promise has not yet been unfolded. There is something like an emphasis in the way in which it is written, and the peculiar form of expression is not devoid of significance. I am "in the midst" of them. Jesus is not merely beside his people, observing their condition, and ready to tender his aid in their difficulties. He is not only manifested as near to them all, to inspire them with confidence and hope. He is in the very midst of them, mingled with the assembly, and equally near to every person who composes it. And this naturally suggests the thought, and confirms the doctrine, that Jesus is not only with his people for the purpose of examining into their wants, and conferring upon them those blessings of his salvation which are common to all believers, but, moreover, that with tender consideration he regards the utterances of every individual heart, and makes the outgoings of his benevolence not merely commensurate to their expressed desires, but confers upon each those special graces which are fitted at once to sweeten the spiritual intercourse of the soul with himself, and to enrich it with those divine ornaments which shall best display the lustre of his own glory. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. It is his delightful office to "lift up the hands that hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees." It is the part of him who is meek and lowly in heart to "appoint unto them that mourn, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for



the spirit of heaviness." It is his to say to the timid soul, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God;" to those, who are tempted, to whisper the glad assurance, "my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is perfect in weakness." It is his to shew to the ignorant the treasures of his wisdom, and to say of the backsliding penitent, "bring forth for him the fairest robe, and let the fatted calf be killed, for this my son was dead and is alive, he was lost, and is found." For every diversity of condition in which his people are placed, Jesus has something appropriate to bestow, and he is in the midst of them for the very purpose of providing for their special wants, and soothing the diseases, and healing the plagues of every soul. Confide, then, O believer, in this merciful Saviour, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead." Open up your hearts to communion with him. Let him know your spiritual diseases—fear not to express to him your heart's desires—and thus all your plagues shall be healed, and your souls filled with peace and joy unspeakable.

And is it really so that this promise is in course of daily fulfilment among Christ's people? It were worth while, as the best test and assurance of it, to examine the feelings, and to ascertain the supplies given to an assembly of sincere worshippers. Suppose for a moment that we were gifted with a power of vision into the inner chambers of thought, and that we could see an assembly of disciples as they are presented to the eye of omniscience—that we were cognizant of the thoughts which occupy the mind, and the degree in which these operate upon the affections—and that we could notice the outgoings of the various desires of every heart, and measure the degree of their intensity, then beyond doubt we would also perceive the outpourings of the divine beneficence—to every soul its measure—for every desire its

appropriate counterpart presented—and to the intently directed thought visions of heavenly truth opened up as intimate, and satisfying, and subduing, as those which prophets and holy men of old were privileged to enjoy. Nay, without supposing this unattainable spectacle of the spiritual world, is there not presented to our common every-day observation, if we would but notice it, an abundant confirmation of the promise before us? Let but two persons, differently circumstanced, speak over their individual experiences after leaving the assembly of saints, and the faithfulness of Jesus to his promise would become at once apparent. The same truths have been presented to all, and in the same form—the same desires have been expressed in prayer—the same thanksgivings uttered, yet how infinitely varied are the results produced! Even on the supposition that all are believers, and that Jesus has been giving something to all, sending none empty away, how diverse the gifts he has through the same instrumentality bestowed! One soul, according to its need and its capacity, has laid firm hold of one truth, on which it rests and in which it rejoices—another has obtained a new view of the infinite grace and beauty of Jesus, and is ravished with the contemplation of it, and so throughout all the diversity of human condition—according to the temptations, the distresses, the capacities of each, it has been found that Jesus has been ministering his varied gifts. The like figure to this we have presented to us in the processes of the vegetable world. In a garden, the trees of various kinds, the bushes, the vegetables, the flowers, have all outwardly and visibly the same kind of nourishment supplied to them—they are all planted in the same soil—they are all refreshed by the same showers—warmed by the same sun—fanned by the same breezes, yet how diversified

the results, and how gloriously do the wisdom, and power, and beneficence of God shine forth in them ! He fits each for the reception of those ingredients suited to its nature—endows each with the power of elaborating and assimilating these—and supplies each with its appropriate nourishment. Even so it is with Jesus in the midst of his people. He distributes to every one of them the portion they require—those gifts which fit them for the place they are designed to fill, and the purpose which in the kingdom of grace they are intended to serve. And all this he accomplishes through the same outward instrumentality.

Nor must it be forgotten that all this divine operation, whereby an infinitely varied supply is afforded, and results equally glorious and harmonious are produced—each member being fitted for its own special office—it must not be forgotten that all this is directly spiritual, and that there is throughout a twofold operation carried on. For not only is Jesus in the midst of his people—standing as it were close beside every soul, and with untiring beneficence conferring upon it a suitable provision, but Jesus is also *in* every believer—within the sanctuary of his heart, creating within it, and enabling it to put forth its gracious affections—transforming it by his plastic hand—enlarging its capacities, and fitting them for the reception of heavenly nourishment. This also is involved in the promise of the text, and this view of it is what constitutes its chief preciousness. For what were it to the dead to mock them with the offer of food, of which they had no power, and could have no desire to partake ? But Jesus is in the midst of his people. He comes knocking at the door of their hearts, eliciting a welcome admission, and gaining access through the power of his own grace—he controls and directs all their thoughts within them—and sends forth those far-reaching desires

which enter into that which is within the veil. And it is of importance to bear in mind that this promised presence of Jesus is not transient and temporary—is not reserved for some rare and solemn occasions. The expression of the text is very emphatic. I *am* in the midst of them—a much more decisive statement than if it had been expressed in the future—I *shall* be with you. For it amounts to this: In the circumstances described, you may be assured there shall be no room for expectant and anxious hope. It is always a present truth. I *am* with them. In no age of the world, in no country shall this be untrue. My presence shall anticipate hope. Nowhere shall my people be gathered together in my name but it is true concerning them at that time and in these circumstances that I *am* in the midst of them.

Behold, then, how very rich is the promise of the text—a promise that endureth for ever—a promise boundless in its reach and amplitude! How may we attain its realization? Under what circumstances shall it be fulfilled in our experience? Let us now, therefore, enquire into the second thing proposed, and endeavour to discover the circumstances under which we may surely expect the fulfilment of this rich and divine promise. “When two or three are gathered together in my name.”

It is obvious from the context, as already stated, that the promise has a special and primary application to the office-bearers of Christ's church, when gathered together for the exercise of church government. But while this is plainly the primary and special application of the text, it cannot be doubted that it was given forth for the direction and comfort of the disciples of Christ in the widest sense of the term, and that the promise it contains may be laid hold of in faith by all assemblies of Christ's people.

And in this view I remark, first, that the promise is made to disciples. This is obvious from its connection with the preceding verse, in which the answer to united and believing prayer is promised to two of them, *i.e.* of the disciples, harmonizing in their sentiments, and from the heart sending up to God the same requests. The two or three in the text, are just the same class of persons, for it is stated as the very ground on which their prayers will be answered, that "Jesus is in the midst of them," giving efficacy to all their petitions, and acceptance to all their services, by his own infinite worth, and his all-prevalent intercession. And when we consider this, is there not plainly discovered to us at least one reason why our solemn assemblies, in the house of prayer, are so little blessed? Outwardly, indeed, all are there as disciples, but how very little is there of the spirit of discipleship—of looking to Jesus for light, comfort, peace, purity, the effusion of every grace! Outwardly all assume the reverent attitude of prayer, but how little is there of real oneness of heart, and faith, and hope, touching those things which they shall ask of God! And here we complain not so much of that mere cold formalism so extensively prevalent, which induces men to draw near to God with the mouth, and honour him with the lips, while the heart is far from him. Our complaint is, that the prayer of the sanctuary is not joined in, even as a matter of form. Its language enters into the ear, but it provokes no gracious desire heaven-ward. It is heard, not joined in. It may be the prayer of the minister, it is not the prayer of the people. They do not unite together in it, and hence it brings down no liberal response from heaven. How changed would the aspect and the enjoyments of our assemblies be, if this soul-starving habit were altogether abandoned; if, as disciples of a common Lord, we were with one accord in



one place ; if the utterance of every petition from the minister brought forth the image and echo of itself from the souls of all the people, so that the desires should not be his but theirs also—the prayer not an utterance for them, but an utterance by them—united hearts sending up one common petition ! It is not a groundless imagination, but one of the most sober and well-grounded realities of faith in such circumstances, to expect the revival of the glorious days of Pentecost. Indeed, amid all the faithlessness and carnality of Christ's disciples, there is left to us so much at least of the experimental proof of the truth embodied in the text, as to satisfy us of this. There are, perhaps, in every congregation, more or fewer who in some measure fulfil the conditions of the promise, who meet together as disciples. And to them Christ proves his faithfulness. The assembly is the most delightful place of resort to them, for it is their meeting place with Christ. They feel it to be refreshing and profitable for their souls. They receive out of Christ's exhaustless stores. It is seldom that the Sabbath is to them a day lost, and if there be such times of drought and barrenness, none are so prepared to admit as they, that they have lost a precious opportunity ; not because Christ is faithless, but because they have not met as disciples. Nor does the experience of others afford less convincing proof of the faithfulness of Christ to his promise. The Sabbath is to them a weariness. They go to the house of God with listless minds, with hearts hardened and encrusted with worldly cares, and they return home more wearied than they went. So much time has been passed over, but it has been time wasted. Jesus has not been beside them, they have not seen him in his holy place, nor have they tasted of his grace. But wherefore ? They have not gone up to the assembly as disciples ; they have not

waited there in that character. They have gone in obedience to the claims of custom, without faith and without hope, and they have been sent empty away. They have not taken any part in the services of the sanctuary, and they have not been made partakers of its blessings. They have presented their bodies indeed before the Lord, but then the text contains no promise of carnal blessings. It is with the soul that God has to do in all its thoughts and affections. And were the investigation made, whether the thoughts, and desires, and hopes, and fears of such men were gathered within the sanctuary, and waiting in patient expectation upon God, we would find that, so far from the circumstances being realized in which we might expect the fulfilment of the promise, these seeming disciples of Jesus who have been visibly brought together, were in reality each eagerly pursuing his worldly avocations—the merchant engaged in his busy traffic, and the labourer anticipating the renewal of his toil. What fearful mockery is this of the Divine omniscience? Does it not cease to be wonderful that there should be so little realization of the Divine promises? Is it not altogether amazing that there should not be upon us the visitation of destructive wrath?

But when we say that Christ's promise in the text is to disciples, it is needful to guard against the inference, that it is vain for others to wait upon his ordinances. Christ, it is true, has said that he is in the midst of his disciples, but this, so far from excluding others from such an assembly, contains an ample encouragement for them to come. Christ is there—pre-eminently, peculiarly, powerfully, graciously, there. This is the very place then to meet him, and to behold his glory and the power of his grace. Christ is in the midst of his disciples to strengthen and refresh them; he is there to convince and convert the unbeliever.

The king is there with his quiver full of arrows ; and it is there especially that he pierces the hearts of his adversaries. He is there to wound, that he may bind up and heal.

I remark, secondly, that in order to realize the riches of the promise, the disciples must be gathered together. It is true that there is no time, and there are no circumstances, when Christ is absent from his people. His promise is, " Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." He is not only beside his people, but dwelling in them by his Spirit. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. And it is most comforting and blissful to know that we are called upon to undertake no duty, to endure no trial, in which we have not the assurance of Christ's presence and aid. He dwelleth with us, and shall be in us. But he has given special promises to the congregation of his disciples, and from what we read of the experience of the saints of old, as well as from what has come within the range of our own observation, we are entitled to conclude that it is within his house, and in the assembly of his saints, that he makes the clearest manifestations of his glory, and pours forth the richest effusions of his grace. Hear, for example, the testimony of David, " How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house ; they will be still praising thee," Psalm lxxxiv. " As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God ? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me : for I had gone with the multitude ; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy

and praise, with a multitude that kept holiday," Psalm xlii. It was manifestly as the result of his own personal experience that he declared, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." And now were our hearts but one in anticipation and in desire with that of the Psalmist, we would become possessed of the same experience, and know it as a joyful truth that the Lord loveth the gates of Zion. This place would soon become distinguished as the birth-place of souls, and also as that in which there was the nearest access to God, and the brightest manifestations of his glory.

Now, none of us, at least, are without the experience of having been often gathered together with the multitude that keep holiday, and go to the house of God. How does it stand with us in respect to the experimental fulfilment of this promise? Have we met with Christ? Has he been in the midst of us? Have we seen his power and his glory in the sanctuary? If not, the guilt is all on our side—it is all accumulated on our heads. And it is an overwhelming iniquity to have spent one profitless Sabbath within the courts of the Lord's house. The king, by the proclamation of the text, has invited us to come and meet with him in his court, that he might make us partakers of his grace, and to show us all his riches and power, and we have slighted the invitation, and thus insulted his majesty and his goodness. There can be no doubt that Christ is there, and if we have not met him, and been satisfied with his presence, it is because we have not been there. Our bodies may have been, but our spirits have not waited upon him. And the communion of Christ with his people is that of spirit with spirit. The assembly spoken of in the text is not the gathering together of the outer frame work, but of living spirits—the gathering in of the wandering thoughts—

the subjugation of the unruly desires—the concentration of the mind—the summoning of all the faculties of our nature to a reverent waiting upon Jesus. To do this is to gather ourselves together, and when we do this, Christ is in the midst of us. To do otherwise is to mock Jesus with the show of worship.

But you will observe still farther, that the disciples are not only to be gathered together, but to be gathered together in the name of Christ. Now, in order fully to understand what this means, consider for a moment what it is to pray in the name of Christ. It is to utter our requests in the full consciousness of our own infinite demerit—to confess that we can hope for and obtain nothing from God on our own account—to entertain full confidence in the merits of Jesus, and in the faithfulness of the covenant promises in him. It is to renounce ourselves, and to put on Christ—to hope for mercy only in him, as washed in his blood, and clothed with his righteousness. Again, when Peter, at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, said to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk,” he was doing a work, to the performance of which he was himself utterly incompetent. His word had power, because the Spirit of Christ was within him, and he did the miracle in the name of Christ, just to declare that this was a manifestation of the grace and power of Jesus, and not of his own, that he was able to do it just because Christ was in him, and working through him. In the same sense you are to understand the general exhortation, “Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” For as we find this exhortation exemplified in the life of the Apostle, we perceive that whatever he did, he did it through Christ strengthening him. We find him even declaring that he had no life of



his own—that everything he did and said and thought was so much Christ's, that it was to be disavowed and disowned as his own. “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now lead in the flesh is by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Thus, then, we are led to perceive what is the meaning of gathering together in name of Christ. We are to come as led by his grace, and under the constraining power of his love. We are to come before God as guilty and deserving only of wrath—hoping in Christ—cleaving to Christ—covered by Christ. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings.” We are to gather under the wings of Christ—as acceptable only in him—we are to speak and hear his words—looking to him as made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Hence you will perceive the whole of the gracious meaning embodied in the text. It is a declaration on the part of Christ, that all which is needed in order to obtain the manifestation to us of his glory—his efficient and never-failing help—the communication of the graces which each one of his people severally require—in order to have him dwelling in us in all the constraining and elevating influence of his spirit—in order to our being made partakers of the fulness of the blessings of his purchase; all that is needed is, not that we should make ourselves worthy of his favour, but to receive freely of his exhaustless stores. He is in the midst of us, anticipating as it were every wish, and going beyond the compass of our desires and expectations; he is there even before we call him, and answers while we are yet speaking, if only we come as disciples and gather ourselves in his name. There can be no doubt that he will

take us—adopt—cherish—glorify us ; all the difficulty and hindrance is overcome when we have taken him. He does not hesitate and draw back from us—the reluctance is all on our part. When we have gathered together in his name, he is already in the midst of us. And then observe for a moment how the connection between Christ's abiding presence and the reception of all heavenly blessings is brought out in the text. It shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven, *for* where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them. When Jehovah looks on such an assembly he is well pleased for his righteousness sake. He sees not them, but him who is in the midst of them. He regards them in the face of his anointed. They become objects of his infinite complacency as in Christ. He is well pleased with the Son, and therefore with them. All Christ's beauty and merit is theirs, and all the love of the Father to the Son becomes theirs. Here then we discover the secret source of all the believer's privileges and enjoyments. These all come to him through Christ, and as he is abiding in Christ. He has Christ's name upon him, and Christ's spirit within him, and hence the Father accomplishes for him all things needful now, and will crown him with glory hereafter.

#### § VII. THE GERM OF OFFENCES IN OUR NATURE TO BE ROOTED OUT.

“Then came Peter unto him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him.”

The bearing of this question of Peter upon the matter in hand is not at first sight very apparent. Jesus has been speaking of one thing, while the mind of the apostle seems to have been wandering in a different direction, and now he

appears to break in suddenly upon this discourse with a question not fitted to throw farther light on what might be difficult to comprehend in it. In assuming that this is the case, however, we would be led astray. Peter, indeed, proves by his question that he is a scribe yet imperfectly acquainted with the things of the kingdom, but he speaks at the same time as one who has been taught of God, and is not destitute of spiritual discernment. It is no unseemly rashness which now prompts his enquiry. He has been looking intently into this matter which Jesus has been expounding at length—perhaps all the more because he felt that he had some immediate personal concern in it, and he wishes to have his future course of action made perfectly clear to him. It is true that Jesus had been speaking of the matter of offences, and the proper mode of dealing with them, and Peter's question relates to the duty of forgiveness. Jesus had been speaking of judgment, and Peter asks about mercy. His question, therefore, does not connect itself so much with the concluding words of Jesus as with the whole scope of his discourse. The answer which Jesus makes to the question reveals to us how much it enters into the very heart and marrow of that subject, which he had been pressing upon the attention of his disciples. An offence had been actually existing and operating in that little band, and was producing those alienations and discords which were sure to consume their whole spiritual life. A dispute had arisen among them which of them should be the greatest. Jesus lays hold of this incident as a text from which to exhibit their common relation to him, and the mutual relation in which, therefore, they stood to each other. He deals with the matter of offences and the mode of treating them both in the church and in the world, and indicates at once their origin and their danger. He speaks especially

and fully of offences as springing up in the church, and shews how the individual believer first of all, and then the church, was to dispose of them and cast them out. But, previous to this, he had exhibited the secret source of all offences in a corrupt human nature seeking its own selfish ends, and had shown how inconsistent such a spirit was with the profession of Christianity. By word and emblem he had illustrated the nature of Christian humility in its outgoings and its foundation, as resting on the fact that the Christian was a lost one, and is now saved by grace. The form of his discourse is evidently due to the special question which had arisen among the disciples. But here, in answer to Peter, he speaks of no special offence. The question of the apostle generalises the whole subject, and Jesus now therefore aims his discourse at the root and source of all offences, whether in the church or in the world. That, indeed, had been already indirectly indicated in his previous discourse, but now in the form of a parable he deals with it more directly and at large. The offence which had been the occasion of this discourse was in its general principle this—namely, the spirit of self assertion, the fact of a man in the Christian church seeking his own. The dispute which of them should be the greatest had its origin here. Forgetting alike what they had been and what they had become—forgetting the fact that they were creatures entirely of grace, saved by Jesus out of a lost condition—they had become ambitious, and were setting up against each other rival claims.

It is of the same principle that the parable treats, and which it still farther illustrates. The key note of the whole will be found in verse 28: "Pay me that thou owest." This is the offence—this demand, so inconsistent with the position and profession of a Christian. It is an offence repugnant even to our human feelings, and necessarily ruinous to the

Christian's position. The fact that he has been forgiven an infinite debt destroys all claim he can assert against his fellow men. Himself being wholly bankrupt, he cannot demand payment of his own debts. Nothing can be due to him who owes more than his all to another. And if his own debt be really cancelled, his books must be cleared of all claims against others. He stands himself free because of an infinite forgiveness, and there must be therefore no limit to the forgiveness he extends to others. The fact of his redemption supersedes and destroys all his personal claims. Being a creature of grace, he must be gracious. By his position as a Christian, he has abandoned the right of self assertion—of claiming anything as his own. He has been bought with a price, and is no longer his own, and has therefore no standing ground as against a brother Christian—nothing to demand of him, because they have a common life and property in Christ.

Hence the direct relevancy of this question of Peter. With such spiritual discernment as he had, he perceived clearly enough that there underlay the avoidance and removal of offences this spirit of forgiveness—that he himself must be an offender unless he forgave—that it was impossible this brotherhood of Christianity could exist if each man were to seek his own and assert his own claims. But it seemed to him that there must be some limit to this. He felt as if he were committing himself to a course of action which it would be impossible to carry through unless he were to stop somewhere—that in this busy and bustling world, amid its keen competitions and rivalries, where each man was seeking to outrun his fellows and to get the pre-eminence, it would be impossible for the Christian to exist at all, if he were to yield up everything—to assert no claim—to insist on the payment of no legal debt. He would



be imposed upon at all hands, and trampled down to the very dust. And whatever might be his relation to the world without—even though a claim might be reserved which he could urge and enforce against its people—if, in his intercourse with them, it were permitted to him so far to act on their own principles, and make good his demands upon them—was it even safe to commit himself absolutely to such a course of action towards his fellow disciples as would denude him of all such right? A certain measure of kindness and forbearance and love he admits to be due to them—but he assumes that there must be a limit, and presses to know what that limit is. Granted that in this Christian fellowship every man must not be seeking his own, else evidently their fellowship must be dissolved—that there can be no true brotherhood under such a law as that which regulates the conduct of the world—granted that I must forbear and forgive, that I must even go a great way in this direction—is there no point on which I can take my stand and assert some claim of my own?—shall I forgive my brother seven times? This is to go a great way—so Peter evidently thinks. This, therefore, might fulfil the law of Christian charity.

The answer of Jesus makes it evident that it is not so. Self seeking must be abandoned entirely. The law to which the church owes her being is a law of infinite forgiveness, and this is the law under which she must live and act. There must be no reserve—no standing room for self—else Christianity itself is abandoned. It gives all, and therefore demands the surrender of all. There can be no demand for any thing, where every thing is the gift of free grace. Redemption does not merely abridge the claims of self, it annihilates them.

Thus, then, Jesus at once and directly answers the ques-

tion of Peter : " I say not unto thee, until seven times ; but until seventy times seven,"—that is to say, you must forgive without restriction or limitation, for the use of this number seventy is clearly enough an expression for an infinite number. I must never take my stand on self—must never assert my own claims. Nor in fully committing myself to such a principle, do I incur any hazard. The danger lies all on the other side. When as a little child, on his own warrant and invitation, I have cast myself into the arms of Jesus, and am resting on the loving bosom of the omnipotent, I have reached the place of most assured safety, but just that place also in which I can demand nothing for myself.

But to meet the yet imperfect apprehension of the disciples, and to exhibit the grounds on which he has already given a general deliverance, in answer to Peter's question he puts his discourse into the form of a parable. Assuming that his stand for self is made any where—that even after long forbearance and forgiveness, the Christian at length presses his personal claim as against a brother—Jesus will shew how the matter stands. If such a personal demand is to be made at all, the first question evidently is, In what state are you who make it ? What is your position as a Christian, when you make this claim and assert this right for yourself ? The answer to this enquiry occupies the first part of this parable, from vers. 23 to 27 : " Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents : But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped

him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and fo gave him the debt."

In substance and spirit it is the same statement as Jesus had already made, vers. 11—14, and the one passage may be taken as illustrative of the other; and such a comparison besides will help to exhibit the strict connection and continuity of this whole narrative. Generally, then, this portion of the parable sets before me the fact, that if I am true to my profession as a Christian, I am a lost one, now saved by the infinite grace and love of Christ, standing before God on the footing of a free and infinite forgiveness, and being thus saved—the creature of the infinite grace of Christ, and so not now in bonds, and sold to hopeless slavery—owing my life and liberty entirely to Christ, and I have, therefore, become his only and altogether, and can have no right to assert and enforce any thing for myself. The liberty which has been freely given me, surely is not bestowed that I might bring others into bondage. As a lost one, due an infinite debt, and having nothing wherewith to pay it, even in this condition I could legitimately assert no claim. Myself sold into bondage, I could have no property. But surely my redemption out of that bondage cannot create or revive such a claim. To my Redeemer I owe everything, and as my debts have been all cancelled, no one can owe me anything. I can have no property, claim, or interest apart from Christ. He has become to me all, and my interests are all merged and swallowed up in his. Not to forgive everything, is, therefore, to proclaim myself unredeemed.

Observe in what a clear light the parable brings out this great and fundamental truth of the Christian life. In it God is represented as a king, and I as his servant. This is

the first parable in which he is so represented, but he is necessarily so spoken of here, because the act of forgiveness which is the subject of the parable, is a royal act. It is the sovereign who dispenses mercy, and he does it sovereignly. It is a thing which subjects and servants cannot construe into a matter of right. He can exact what they owe, or can remit the obligation. In his character as king, then, he is represented as coming to a reckoning, with his servants. This evidently is not the final reckoning in which all are summoned at once into his presence, and his eternal awards are dispensed. It is such a reckoning as God comes to with me within the sphere of time, and within the domain of his gracious dispensation—when he comes near to me or any one in the testimony of his word—when the spirit quickens my conscience, and applies to it that word—when he takes me to the Mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, and makes me to hear the voice of his law—when he sets my sins in the light of his countenance, and rouses me out of the deep death-like slumber of nature—when he makes me feel that I must come to a reckoning with him for the deeds done in my body, that I am responsible to him for the use I have made of all that he has given and entrusted to me—when by any instrumentality, whether directly by the testimony of his word, or by sore adversities and afflictions, he constrains me to think of such a reckoning, and how I am to meet it ;—then, when I am made to understand that this is the sovereign Lord and judge with whom I have to do, I feel that mine iniquities, indeed, are past reckoning—that I could not answer him for one of a thousand—that I have incurred a countless debt, and have nothing wherewith to pay.

Notice the truthfulness with which the parable brings out the actual state of the case. The debtor is not selected

as one whose case is peculiarly aggravated, as if the king, grievously suspecting some malversation in some one of his officers, had singled him out for trial and judgment. The case occurs in the ordinary course and at the very commencement of the reckoning. It is the first which comes to hand. All are alike guilty—all infinitely indebted and infinitely poor—dishonoured, hopelessly bankrupt. There is not even that good in the debtor which will lead him to ask a reckoning with his creditor, which will constrain him to go and tell how the case stands, and make known his poverty, and crave forgiveness or delay. When the king begins his reckoning this debtor is *brought to* him, and does not offer himself willingly. He thought it his interest to postpone the reckoning, and never would have come of himself, but would have gone on indefinitely increasing his debt.

Thus it is that sinners act towards God. They become afraid of looking into their obligations, and seem to think that, by forgetting, they will somehow cancel them. The fact that they are indebted leads them to hide themselves from his presence, as if they could do so for ever, and to shut out of view the judgment, as if thus they could escape it. How is it with you? Have you been brought to this terrible reckoning with the king? or are you studiously shunning it, closing your ears alike to the voice of conscience and of the divine law—afraid to look into your state and character, and to receive *now* the verdict of God's word upon them? It is indeed a painful thing to be brought to such a reckoning. There belongs to it unspeakable shame, self-loathing, humiliation. But can it possibly lessen the anguish of such a reckoning to postpone it? Evidently the reverse must be the case. You increase your debt by every day's delay, and become more hopelessly in-



volved, and make your reckoning more difficult. It is so even in the business of this world. If, by unforeseen accidents—by miscalculations—by sudden depression of trade—or in whatever other way—I find that I cannot meet my obligations ; that if my creditors were to call me to a reckoning, I could not fully discharge my debt, I am apt enough, though the course is far from a wise one, by various shifts and expedients, to postpone the reckoning, and to trust to some change of fortune which shall alter my position, till what at first might have been easy becomes more and more difficult, and the debt which at first might without much inconvenience have been cancelled, accumulates to such an amount, that when bankruptcy becomes at last inevitable, I am not only hopelessly ruined, but involve many others in my bankruptcy and misery. In a far higher sense, and with more inevitable certainty, the same thing holds good regarding the divine reckoning. I must come to it with an ever deepening shame and misery the longer it is postponed. Here there is no possibility of retrieving my condition. My debt is already quite past reckoning, and it must become greater the longer my accounting is deferred. To me, indeed, with such a debt, belong shame and confusion of face. But it is better to embrace that shame now, to confess my poverty and degradation, than to have all that debt standing against me, when mercy is clean gone for ever—when even my prayer for delay cannot be heard, but judgment must go forth against me, without hope of reversal or relief.

The reckoning itself is inevitable. Shall we meet it now or then ? That is the momentous question for us. Let us come to it now. God is really reckoning with us, recording our debts, demanding that we should investigate their amount, and consider his claim and what is to become of

us. It does not, indeed, seem a very hopeful thing to come to such a reckoning. Our debt is found to amount to ten thousand talents—a countless sum. No Croesus was ever rich enough to pay it. The wealth of empires would be exhausted in vain to discharge it. What, then, under such a debt, must be our destiny? The law of the king utters no uncertain voice regarding it. His judgment of our case is declared in that law. Having nothing wherewith to pay, he commands that we should be sold, and our wife and children,—our persons and all that belongs to us being liable for the debt. This is the law's sentence and curse. So it speaks unequivocally now and always. That law is just, and justice demands restitution. Is the reckoning, then, here ended? No, verily, else no one could ever have courage to come to it; else it were indeed better indefinitely to postpone it, for in such a case we would only anticipate our condemnation. This sentence of the law does not necessarily take effect. We are, indeed, at the Sovereign's mercy, and that evidently is our only hope. We cannot pay, and therefore we must suffer, unless we obtain mercy. But what is the mercy which the debtor first of all asks? "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all." He merely asks the mercy of forbearance. It is the voice of nature, in its deep-rooted spirit of self-righteousness, and its latent enmity to God. There must be payment. We must stand with God on equal terms. He shall have no claim against us. We shall vindicate our independence. What we need is not the discharge of the obligation, but merely the postponement of his claim. We are not utterly and hopelessly bankrupt. We shall retrieve our condition, if only time be allowed us, and shall make good all that God demands of us. Such is what we promise to ourselves, and to God. We feel that at this moment we could not

vindicate ourselves as innocent—as free of all charge—but then we shall make ourselves such. Oh the folly and blindness of this deceitful nature of ours!—blind, especially, to these two things, first, to the requirements of the law, and second, to our own incapacity to meet them. That law demands the entire devotedness of our whole nature to the service of God, now and always, and hence there can never be any making up of past deficiencies—never any discharge in this way of a debt already contracted. Whatever we can do, now and hereafter, yea beyond all that we can do, the law demands that we shall constantly render. There can be nothing for us, then, under the law, but the contraction of new debt. Now, even when we ask forbearance, and promise future payment, do we really feel that we can even meet the claims of the passing moment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Is it in our power to do that? Are we now able? When we make this deceitful promise, are our hearts glowing with divine love? Nay, verily. Such a promise is an imposition. We cannot fulfil it. We do not even mean to fulfil it. It is the last desperate resource of human nature to get quit of a divine and inalienable claim. Let us above all in this reckoning be honest and guileless. We cannot pay now, or at any time hereafter. Our one plea must be for mercy—for unconditional free grace.

The king's servant has in the parable come to the reckoning with a deceitful promise on his lips. He cannot now render payment of his debt, but, as desperate debtors very often do, he says he will meet the claim on a future day. By such a promise he does not mean honestly to attempt payment; he wishes merely, in the meantime, to get quit of the demand. Such is the true character of self-righteousness always. It is a spirit in which it is not possible that God

and the sinner can come to terms. It is a spirit of hidden enmity to God—a rooted dislike to the demand which he makes—a desperate resource to escape from his claims. But, in infinite condescension and love, God meets this self-righteous spirit with his word of free forgiveness—the only word at all applicable to the case, and fitted to meet the exigency. He says to sinners, in the gospel, your debt is cancelled. You need not be troubled about meeting my claim, and thus involve yourselves more deeply in guile and deceit. Your debt cannot be reckoned up, but it is all forgiven. It is thus that the gracious Father speaks to me in his word. That word which reveals to me my guilt, reveals to me also the entire removal of it.

This forgiveness comes not to me indeed in the way of a general amnesty, but as the result of a special, personal reckoning. He has, it is true, proclaimed forgiveness, and revealed himself as a God forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin. But I am not pardoned in virtue of that proclamation. This would be a most fatal delusion. I become the more guilty in consequence of it, unless I go and tender my submission. This is the case even in human governments, when the sovereign proclaims an amnesty to his rebellious subjects. Forgiveness is only obtained when my rebellion ceases, and I have submitted myself to the government. So it is in the government of God. He does not pardon in the dark; when he forgives he will make me know what I am forgiven, and therefore he calls me first to a reckoning, and makes known to me the infinite amount of my debt. “Come now, he says, and let us *reason* together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be made white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be made as wool.” The reasoning comes before the forgiveness. I must first hear the summation of my debt, and the

sentence of my condemnation. I must come to this personal accounting with him, and acquiesce in the justice of that sentence which the law pronounces. How reluctantly I do this is manifested in the parable. I seek to pay him with promises and false pretences. But it is not thus that the demands of God's law are to be met or evaded. They cannot be accepted in lieu of payment. God shuts them all out, and destroys the very foundation of, and excuse for them, by the intervention of his own compassion—a compassion extended at once to my guilt, and to the deceitfulness of my heart. He tells me of his infinite forgiveness—that he will exact nothing—that I am loosed and set free. He assumes that I can pay nothing, and therefore he forgives all.

It is thus He deals with me in his word, for it is ever to be remembered, in the exposition of this parable, that the reckoning to which I am brought is that to which the word brings me, and so the forgiveness is that which the word proclaims. It does not necessarily follow that the forgiveness is really mine. God, indeed, freely bestows it, but it is only mine when it is accepted. According to the representation of the parable, I have not met him on his own terms. My plea against immediate retribution is not the plea which the word put into my mouth. It is a plea which my own proud and deceitful heart suggests. It is a plea for delay, and a promise of payment. But God will not deal with me on this footing, but on one radically and entirely different. He offers me immediate, free, unaccepted forgiveness. Such is the message of his word to me. Surely it is a very gracious message. The servant in the parable does not say, I cannot stand on these terms with my sovereign, I will rather adhere to my own. I will not be indebted to this grace. I will still pay at some future time. He has not the courage thus directly and insolently



to meet the offer of his sovereign. Perhaps for the moment he may think that the sovereign's plan is upon the whole more advantageous than his own. But he does not in terms close with it. He goes away in ominous silence.

So it is very often in our dealings with the supreme Lord. When we have been visited with convictions of sin, and cannot altogether silence the voice of conscience, we begin to promise to ourselves and to God, amendment—reparation of the evil we have done—and then comes with some feeling of welcome and sweetness to us this message of unspeakable mercy—and we dare not conclusively reject it, but at the same time we will not once for all accept it. It stands over as a matter for future consideration, whether we shall stand on the footing of Christ's righteousness or of our own? We leave this gracious offer in abeyance. Obviously it will be a good thing to fall back upon if we can do no better. But meantime our own promise seems better than God's covenant. The fact that we have not embraced it as the only alternative still proves that we are dealing deceitfully with God and with ourselves—that we are still rebels at heart—that we have practically renounced the only alternative in which there is safety.

The man in the parable, when he promised payment, had evidently no conception of the magnitude of the debt. He had been told it, indeed, in unmistakeable terms, but he had not cast it up in his own mind, or seriously set himself to consider it, and in this frame of spirit forgiveness is never accepted. When I embrace that alternative I have gone a step beyond reading in the word the statement regarding the countless amount of my debt, beyond even hearing some vague accusations of my conscience. I have really come to a reckoning—have ventured to look into my books—and to see the vast sums that are standing against me there—and

have found God's charge verified by my own heart and conscience. I see that God's sentence, as written there, is a just one, and then my plea is no longer for patience, with a promise of future payment. I see that I have nothing wherewith to pay, and my cry then is, God be merciful to me, a sinner! In this reckoning I am brought face to face with God, and in the reflected light of his glory I abhor myself. I can no longer endure to be as I am, even though I could safely be such. Woe is me for I am of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, and my sins are a burden too heavy for me. Then, when the voice is heard, Lo, thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged—it is to me a most welcome voice—the very boon which I need and ask, and I clasp to my heart this charter of my forgiveness and freedom. My bonds are then loosed—I am free, and become a servant of God. My pardon is no longer a forgiveness proclaimed merely, but a divine sentence of pardon in me, as truly as was the sentence of condemnation. Thus I enter into a new relation with God—my rebellion is at end, and my enmity is destroyed.

But all my relations are thereby changed with this change of nature which the accepted pardon implies and produces. I no longer stand to my fellow-men as once I did. I had been guilty of numberless aggravated offences against God. These no longer exist. The very root of them has been cut up in the removal of my enmity under the melting power of his infinite love. My neighbours and brethren also have committed offences more or fewer against me, and so far stand indebted to me for reparation. What now is my relation to them, and to the trespasses which they have committed against me? Can I insist upon my paltry claim and demand payment of my debt? Coming fresh from the mercy-seat, with the gracious voice of God still ringing in

my ears, can I say to my brother, Pay me that thou owest? Is it possible for me thus truly to have received forgiveness and at the sametime refuse to bestow it? Evidently it is not. For, on the one hand, not only does the law of right demand that I should do as has been done to me, but, moreover, in accepting forgiveness at the hand of God, I have entered into his mind in this whole matter. My acceptance of forgiveness implies this, if my reckoning has been really an honest and guileless one. It is not the sort of settlement I would have chosen for myself, but it having been proposed to me and accepted, my mind regarding it has been changed. I have adopted God's mind on the whole matter, and entered into fellowship with him. I am no longer in the condition of a servant bound to pay, and discharging the duties of a reluctant servitude. I am in the position of a son and a friend, on whom God has conferred an unspeakable obligation. I have thoroughly changed sides in the whole matter. The change which has been effected in my condition and responsibility is not greater than that which has been effected in my character. Standing on the footing of a pardoned sinner, God's gracious disposition and purposes become mine also,—having received mercy, I become merciful—being myself pardoned, I forgive—I pass over to God's side, and adopt his gracious purpose regarding the offences that are committed against me. The same mind is in me as in him. It is necessarily so in coming to such terms with God. Being a subject of his grace I become gracious—for this grace of his is not a benefit which merely delivers me from punishment—it enters into and possesses my nature and transforms it. The evidence that I have received mercy is the fact that I have become merciful.

It was not so with the servant in the parable who had heard the king's free offer of forgiveness. His history

proved that he had not made the gift his own—had not really entered into the spirit of the king, nor in any true sense apprehended his grace. By his profession, indeed, and in his outward position, he was an accepted and forgiven man. He has not been sold into perpetual bondage. He was now a member of the church, and externally a Christian, and as such, a man professing to have received forgiveness—to have been a lost one, and to be now saved. But does he justify what that profession implies? He *goes out* and finds one of his fellow-servants who owed him an hundred pence, and seizes him by the throat, and demands instant payment. His conduct is a monstrous contradiction of his profession. He who had been kneeling at God's footstool, and to whom an infinite debt had been forgiven, comprehends it so little as even to make this demand. It is well said in the parable that he *goes out*. He forgets his own reckoning—his own promise—and God's declaration of pardon. This man cannot have the sentence of forgiveness sealed upon his soul. He has not entered into God's gracious method of reckoning, for he has not become gracious. To him God's proclamation has been a mere word, and not a reality. He has been silent indeed when that word was spoken, and has not openly renounced God's terms. Nay, it is a method of settlement which he thinks is still open to him. But it is evident that it is not a concluded covenant. He who refuses to forgive, has not been truly forgiven. In his very dealing with his fellow-servant, indeed, he has much to remind him of his own dealing with God, and he seals upon himself at every step the sentence of his condemnation. His fellow-servant puts in the very same plea which he had urged at the throne of God. Have patience with me and I will pay thee all. What entertainment does he give to that promise? He will not

listen to it for a moment. Now that the case is not his own, he sees the falsehood of such a promise, and how utterly vain and delusive it is. But that plea which had been his own, should have carried him back again to his own reckoning, and recalled to his mind the infinite compassion of God. But it has no such effect, and he casts his debtor into prison. He will not for a moment think of his own reckoning with God, and of what was implied in it. To him it is evidently a hateful subject, and, therefore, to him as yet an unsettled matter. In this transaction with his fellow-servant he has unwittingly revealed his true character and condition. Evidently this man is not what he professes to be. He is not a pardoned sinner, nor a true member of the church. His offence is of a nature inconsistent with such a standing. He will not forgive, and, therefore, he has not been forgiven.

It is important, however, that we should here consider the bearing of all this upon the whole previous exposition by Jesus, of the laws and constitution of the church. He had been speaking of the very matter of which this parable treats. He had been showing how offences must be dealt with, and that they must be separated from the kingdom and from the individual subjects of it. He had shown how personally each one was to be delivered from their dominion, namely, by the entire surrender of himself to Christ, —that is, by really consenting to God's method of salvation, by accepting a full and free forgiveness on his own terms, by converting the proclamation of pardon into a realized fact. Then, apprehending the gracious mind of God, no longer proudly offering payment, but avowedly indebted to infinite grace, thus humbled and self-abandoned, he would necessarily manifest the grace which had been made his.

But then they are men so circumstanced whom Jesus



constitutes as judges in his kingdom. By having been themselves called to a reckoning, and by getting their debt altogether cancelled, they are not put in a position in which they dare not reckon with their fellow-men. Nay, it is the very reverse. They are then bound to deal with men as God has been dealing with them. There must be no unsettled claims. To have these would be a proof that they had been so acting towards God, as indeed many do, and are; therefore, careless of the trespasses of their fellow-men. Such persons have heard the proclamation of the great king announcing his mercy, and are satisfied with *that*, and come to no personal reckoning with God. They do not seek the discharge of their individual debt, and are content to leave the matter undetermined in the vague hope that somehow at last that debt will be found cancelled. But when they have been personally dealing with God, the case is widely different. In that awful accounting, involving such tremendous issues, they will have no uncertainties. The discharge of the debt, must not be left as a mere matter of conjecture. They ask mercy and obtain it. They enter into God's terms, and are made free. But being thus delivered themselves, they carry this new relation with God into all the business and connections of human life. That debt of an hundred pence they will not consent to let stand over, or to let the debtor altogether alone. They have received grace because God did not let them alone, but called them to an account. In the spirit of this grace, therefore, they cannot let alone the trespasses committed against them. They must come to a distinct understanding about them. Standing there unsettled, they are a root of bitterness, creating jealousies, alienations—countless evils. They go therefore to their brother, to demand a settlement. "If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault be-

tween him and thee alone." This is the truest kindness to him and to yourself. To let that trespass rankle in his mind and yours is the worst thing possible. To forget and take no notice of it is not good either. By all means let there be a reckoning, It is God's method, let it be yours also. But go to him in the spirit of that grace which you have received—without self-seeking, pride, vindictiveness. Your reckoning with him must be as God has made his reckoning with you, in the spirit of patient love and of infinite forgiveness. When he offers reparation, you meet him with the offer of pardon. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

But if you refuse to act thus, to come to a reckoning and to forgive, you introduce into the church a new and more deadly offence—the very offence which originated all this discourse and exposition of the principles of Christ's kingdom. To say to my brother, you must make reparation—pay me what thou owest—is to shut out Christ, and to introduce myself—to assert my own claims and to forget God's—to lose sight of my position, and practically to renounce my standing in Christ. To refuse forgiveness is to proclaim that it has not been accepted by me, just as the refusal to part with my sin is an evidence that I have no part nor lot in Christ.

But suppose such a case to arise, either that I refuse to forgive—or that I exact my own claim to the utmost—or that I refuse to give up my sin—how is this offence to be dealt with? Is this, which is really the worst of all offences, and the root of all others, to remain unchecked, and to infect and corrupt

the whole church? No verily. The tyrannical servant of the parable, who was so unworthy of such a master, was evidently no true faithful servant of his at all, and has proved himself to be a traitor and a hypocrite—for he is setting up his own laws against those of the king—and is enforcing them on the king's subjects. He has set up an independent jurisdiction and authority of his own, and will not administer the laws of whose immunity he professes to have availed himself. He must evidently be dealt with. How? 1st, In sorrow and humility. "When his fellow servants saw what was done they were very sorry"—sorry for themselves, sorry for this outrage upon the laws of the king, and the gracious principles of his administration; and humbled that such a scandal should exist in his household. Then, 2d, What in these circumstances do they do? They tell the Lord what has taken place. This is their one ultimate appeal. They will not take judgment into their own hands. They meet, and consult together, and utter their grief to the Lord. And the sentence which they pronounce finally is not theirs, but his. They bring this man anew to a reckoning with the Lord. It is not with his fellowmen that this offender has to deal. He is summoned to a higher tribunal. They invoke and invite God to judge him, and their sentence is merely the expression of God's judgment, and therefore what they thus bind on earth is bound in heaven. It is the Lord truly that reckons again with this wicked apostate. By his word he again calls him into judgment, and through that word pronounces his doom—not now, indeed, as at first setting before him the accumulated amount of his debt, but reminding him of the forgiveness he had proclaimed, and which this unworthy servant had professed to receive—the forgiveness which now constitutes the burden and aggravation of his crime, and gives

him over to the tormentors as a hypocrite and a traitor—who had refused to observe the law to which he had professed subjection—who, being forgiven, has refused to pardon—who, receiving compassion, has not bestowed it—who is not a partaker of grace because he is proved to be ungracious. It is this very exercise of grace which Jesus pictures forth in Matt. xxv. as the test by which men shall be proved at the final judgment. He shall perish without mercy who hath showed no mercy ; but blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

FINIS.





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